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*Bible object-lessons:
addresses to the young*

James Wells

BIBLE OBJECT-LESSONS.



THE SHEPHERD'S CLUB AND STAFF.

See page 153.

THE OBJECT LESSON

THE LESSON OF THE YEAR

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BIBLE OBJECT-LESSONS:

ADDRESSES TO THE YOUNG.

BY THE

REV. JAMES WELLS, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "BIBLE ECHOES," "BIBLE CHILDREN," "BIBLE IMAGES,"
"THE PARABLES OF JESUS," "RESCUERS AND RESCUED,"
"CHRIST AND THE HEROES OF HEATHENDOM."



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PREFACE.

THIS volume, like the four other volumes in the series, contains addresses that were delivered at a Monthly Service for the Young. Some alterations have been made in re-writing these addresses for publication. Two recent visits to Egypt and Palestine have supplied the author with not a few of his illustrations.

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BIBLE OBJECT-LESSONS.



CHAPTER I

THE DARK TREE.

SOLOMON tells us that "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver;" or, as the margins make it, "a word spoken upon its wheels is like apples of gold in baskets of silver, or filigree work" (Prov. xxv. 11).

Well spoken words of grace and truth pass from heart to heart as smoothly and quickly as Solomon's royal carriage upon its splendid wheels. Many now believe that these apples of gold were oranges. "Apple" has always been a general word for any round fruit. We speak of "pine-apples," "oak-apples," "earth-apples," and even of "the apple of the eye." Oranges are thus apples of gold, for they have the very colour of a new sovereign. Put "orange" for "apple" in the Bible, and every verse in which "apple" is found becomes more intelligible and interesting. It is probable that "the golden apple of Discord" was an orange, and that the fabled "golden apples" in the garden of the Hesperides were also oranges. The

A

colour of apples is scarcely golden, and the climate of Palestine is too hot for them. There were oranges in Palestine in Bible times, for we find them chiselled on the ancient tombs of Sidon. Then the brilliant white of the orange-blossom is remarkably like the colour of the molten silver used for "filigree work" in the East. Blossoms and fruit appear at the same time on the orange-tree, and you often see the ripe fruit peeping out amid the shining silvery blossoms. The poet's eye and imagination of Solomon beautifully picture the pleasing scene—"apples of gold in engraved or figured work of silver." An orange-tree, such as you find to-day at Jaffa or Sidon, is one of the most pleasing objects in the East. Its thick fleshy evergreen leaves offer a perfect shade from the scorching sun; its fragrance is most delicious and singularly refreshing, and is perceived, they say, many miles out at sea; its fruit is most abundant, improves with the age of the tree, and is believed to ward off fever; and its snow-white blossom is an emblem of purity.

For all these reasons orange-blossoms are appropriately used at our weddings, for the orange-tree is a picture to the eye of the manifold prosperity love desires for the wedded pair. The custom has travelled to us from the East, the cradle of our race. It was thus natural for the bride in the Song of Songs to compare her beloved to the orange-tree among the trees of the wood, and to say "comfort" (or as it is in the margin), "straw" me with oranges. The bride seems to be thinking of her bridal-wreath of orange-blossom.

All this helps us to understand why Solomon—botanist, poet, and preacher—likens words of heavenly wisdom to golden oranges and their network of silvery blossoms. May God reveal to us all the charms of His holy Word, so that it may delight us as it delighted King Solomon.

You often get object-lessons at school. Your eye rests upon the object while your teacher explains it to you. He thus teaches you to see at once with three eyes: with the two eyes in your face, and with the eye of the soul behind them. The eye thus becomes the gate to mind and heart. What ease, relief, and joy you have as you see the very thing itself! You are grateful to learn so much, and with so much pleasure. Knowledge easily reaches the mind through the eye. The Bible is full of object-lessons that should be a joy both to eye and mind. It has ever so many parables, images, types, examples, and pictured principles. Take away its stories, and what have you left? Its way is to paint truth to the eye in the most beautiful colours. It puts fact by the side of truth, and so makes the truth real, and near, and bright; for truth moves us not by being, but by being very apparent. The Bible scholar is to use his heart and imagination as well as his mind: he is to feel what he knows, and to see what he knows and feels: he should pray that he may be favoured with real visions of things divine.

Open your Bible, and read its first pages. The second chapter spreads out before you the garden of Eden. "Eden" means *delightfulness, pleasure*; and

"paradise" is the Persian name for royal pleasure-grounds. The garden was full of trees, for a treeless park were no paradise in the burning East. Perhaps we may trace back to Eden the liking that all men have for trees. Has it come down to us from Adam? Have we still a dim memory of our first home, and of the fact that the trees were the companions of man's innocence? Can this be the reason why many savage nations worship trees, and under trees? Is this the reason why people with a poetic turn go through forests, hushed and listening, as if they expected to receive a voice from the trees, as our first mother did? Indeed, some believe that the trees do speak to men, for Wordsworth says—

"One impulse of a vernal wood
Will teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can."

One strange tree stood in the centre of the garden, apart from all the rest: it was the sign and test of man's obedience (chap. iii.). Adam and Eve had the *run* of the garden except that one tree. God commanded them not to eat of it or touch it, lest they should die. Let us not be afraid to stand under the deep shadow of this tree and learn its lessons. This emblem from Eden teaches us the eternal distinction between good and evil, right and wrong; the serpent brings under our eyes the tempter and temptation; the eating of the forbidden fruit shows

us the act of sin; the life of Adam and Eve is a lesson for us all; and every child may here find his own history.

This tree teaches a lesson about

I. God's Law.

II. Law-breaking.

III. The Law-breakers.

I. *God's Law.*

Within your reach are apples you should not eat, things you should not do. I daresay you have wondered why it should be so. Why did God ever allow that dark tree and that crafty serpent in His Eden? Thousands of the cleverest men have brooded over this question for a lifetime, but they have not brought us one inch nearer the right answer. We should give over trying to find out how sin got into the world, and should do our very best to get it out of ourselves, and out of the world.

In every garden, in every life, there are apples that we must not touch. Even in your father's garden you cannot do what you like: you are not allowed to pluck any unripe berry, any blossoming bud you have a fancy for: you are not allowed to roam over the flower-beds and seed-plots. Even there, in your own garden, you are hedged about with laws. And it is so in God's garden. You did not make it, and you can't have your own will in it: you must stop somewhere: you are not permitted to take anything just because it looks tempting: you cannot break all bounds.

God's law is like a line or circle around the death-bringing tree. In your games you often make a line, and the one who steps over it or sends the ball beyond it loses the game. The word "law" has a terrifying sound, but take care that you do not run away with a wrong notion of it. Look at our object, and you'll see that God's law is God's love warning us off from what would hurt and kill us. It is the line or limit by which God shuts us in to all that is good for us, and shuts us out from all that would destroy us. All the other trees of Paradise, all its golden rivers, all its ravishing delights and various valleys, were free to Adam and Eve: only this one deadly tree was forbidden. The law might have seemed harsh had it shut them up to one tree and shut them out from all the rest, or had there been only a few trees in the garden, or had Eden been as narrow and bare as a prison or a poorhouse.

In the Indian Mutiny all the English families in a certain district were commanded to enter the fortress. The English children might easily think it a cruel law that drove them from their beautiful homes into a hot, narrow, and nasty place. By some mistake one little English girl was left outside with her Indian nurse. The rebels were gathering, and the girl was in the greatest danger. A brave trooper risked his life to save hers. He galloped to the house, took the little girl in his arms, dashed back—the bullets rattling like hail around him; and as by a miracle gained the fortress. Her mother asked the girl to kiss her deliverer, but she would not: he was a naughty man who

had taken her away from her nurse and her toys. The little thing did not know that for her life was inside the fortress, and death outside.

When you understand God's law you will love it even as you love the Gospel; for inside its hard shell of "Thou shalt not" you will find the sweet kernel of the loving-kindness of our God. The sternness of His law is His mercy in presence of our danger. He is not the Great Forbidder, but the Great Forgiver and Giver. His law is His love hedging you in, and desiring that your home should be in Eden, not in the wilderness. It is a battery protecting all behind it, but threatening destruction to those in front of it. Nothing that is good for you lies beyond His law: be perfectly sure of that. He commands and entreats you to be happy, as if not we but Himself were to receive the favour. They who have furthest explored these deep things of God report—"All's love, yet all's law."

We come now to

II. *Law-breaking.*

By watching Eve you learn how temptation begins and grows into sin, for sin has its infancy and childhood. She listens to the tempter, the hater of God and man. He darts into her mind vile suspicions of the love of God. He makes God's law seem hard to her. He tempts her by an object-lesson. Full in sight of the tree he displays the beauty and advantages of the forbidden thing, rouses her curiosity, and questions the word of God and the sinfulness of the deed.

He promises her a larger and a god-like life. She listens, and eyes the tree with a lingering delight: imagination draws an enchanting picture of the joys to be got from eating the apple: she longs to know what is in the mysterious fruit after all: she falls first in her heart, and soon she sins with the hand also. She has now broken through that sacred fence, and gone clean over the line God had drawn around the tree. Sin is a "trespass," "the transgression of the law" (1 John iii. 4). These two words mean a passing over, or a going beyond. It is one trembling step over the boundary God has drawn between right and wrong. A line or a law does not seem a very great thing. It has no blood, no anger, no hands with which to seize the offender. But every sin against God's law is a rebellion against God, the King eternal, immortal, invisible. To pass over His line is to defy and challenge Him, and to grieve the heart of our Father in heaven.

This chapter gives you the history of your first known sin. It is true to your own life. I have read that a company of officers were once making game of the story of the Fall. One of the most godless of them, who had shed his blood at Balaklava, said, "I would rather charge again up the heights of Balaklava, than read alone the third chapter of Genesis." This chapter held before him the mirror of his own heart, and reminded him of a more awful battle than that of Balaklava—of his fight with the serpent, in which he had been conquered.

Like Adam, you have three tempters—Satan, your

companions, and yourself. It is yourself only that can do the mischief. A thoughtful child once said, "I am an I." He meant that he had a will of his own, and that he could act for himself. The most skilful tempter in the world can only tempt you: he cannot sin for you or force you to sin. Nothing but your own consent can turn your temptation into your transgression. Boys at school, older and wiser and stronger than you, may tempt you with success; but your heart tells you that the bad deed is your own, and blames you for it. "I sinned against my will," said a defaulting soldier to Pericles. "And you shall be punished against your will," was the reply. The poor soldier, I doubt not, felt that Pericles was quite right. All Eve's children are like her in their readiness to cover their shame with the fig-leaves of excuses, but no good comes from throwing the blame of our sins upon circumstances or companions. It is a good sign when we take the whole blame upon ourselves.

At the same time, we have far more hope of the boy whom tempters lead into sin, than of the boy who loves sin, and loves to tempt others. If there be no tempter, no devil, then man himself must be a devil. Adam and Eve were tempted: they were not created sinners, nor were they the first tempters. But we are getting into matters too deep for us.

Oh, remember that none is so good as to be beyond the tempter's reach. Even Christ Himself was tempted in the wilderness, and by the same wiles that were used in Eden. The holiest seem to be the most tempted

The tempter's way is still to charm and bewitch you with false and beautiful pictures. A misleading voice still whispers, "Thou shalt not surely die." You are bidden believe that sin will make a man of you. The tempter still tries to set your fancy on fire with desire of things forbidden. He stirs up within you an eager wish to know what is on the other side of the enclosure. How many young men are utterly ruined by their curiosity to see city life. A minister said lately that they were like a plumber seeking for an escape of gas with a naked light. He finds it, and is scorched to death by the discovery.

This subject fills us with awe. Nothing in the world is so strange as man, and in man nothing is so strange as sin. How strange that sin is so near and so easy to every one of us. Stranger still, that it was so near Adam and Eve in God's Paradise. Strangest of all, that it was so near the angels who fell from heaven. But we must stop here lest matters too high for us make the head giddy.

"But how am I always to know God's line?" you ask. Conscience and God's Word point it out to you. You children are not like wicked old men whose consciences are dulled by the sins of a lifetime. Something within tells you clearly what you should do and what you should not do. Oh, listen to that voice, and tarry not a minute when the tempter sets before you the pleasantness of the forbidden tree. Many a time, to deliberate is to be lost.

Before we part, let us look at

III. *The Law-breakers.*

Think of Adam and Eve before and after the Fall. Sin did all that. What a gloomy retinue it brought into our world. The tempter promised a larger, even a god-like life, but they got only sorrow and death. In your classes and games you *do* hate cheating. The world has seen no other cheating like this. Sin is the greatest cheat in all the world. Hate and shun it, then, with your whole heart.

The story of Eden is an immense object-lesson hung up on the door of the Bible for all mankind. It teaches the eternal difference between law-keeping and law-breaking. It shows us that sin can turn every paradise into a desert, and every happy son and daughter of Adam into a trembling outcast. It is certain that the worst thing about you is your sin, and that all sorrow comes from it; that sin charms only till it is tasted; that what is wrong can never be good; and that it can never profit you to break any law of God. You cannot have both Eden and the forbidden fruit: you must choose which of the two you will have. Have you made your choice?

Though the frown of God is upon them, and the awful flame and sword prevent their return to Eden, Adam and Eve are not left to die in utter despair. God is still their friend, though grieved at their sin, and His very anger has mercy in it. They have fallen far, but they have not fallen beyond the reach of remedy. They have not fallen as far as the evil angels did: it may be that their bodies *broke* their fall, or

in some way held them back. At all events, the Creator does not forsake the damaged work of His own hands: He does not allow His masterpiece to be wholly ruined. So Adam and Eve "heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen. iii. 8). What a fine touch of mercy in that! According to the proverb of the Jews, Michael, the messenger of wrath, flies with but one wing, while Gabriel, the angel of mercy, flies with two. When the Prodigal Son was nearing home the father *ran*. He did not wait for the cool of the day, and then only walk leisurely: in the heat of the day he ran "a great way," and his kisses did not allow his boy to tell the half of his shame. But when He had to punish in Eden He did not run. That was His strange work, and He did it as if with an unwilling willingness, as if He were slow and loth to do it, speaking after the manner of men. He began to show mercy before He was asked. And He gave them these words of the blessed Gospel, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. iii. 15). Even on the day of their fall, Adam and Eve were thus told of a God-given Saviour, a Saviour in human form, a suffering Saviour, and a triumphant Saviour. You know His name. Heartily make Him your Saviour, and He shall guide you all the way to a better paradise than Adam lost. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

ABEL'S ALTAR.

A NEW YEAR SERMON.

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."—HEB. xi. 4; GEN. iv.

WALKING home the other evening, I noticed that light from above and light from below, star-light and gas-light, made my path plain. So your path in life should be cheered by two lights consenting to shed their united radiance upon you. These sister-lights are Scripture and experience. As gas-light and star-light both come from the sun, so Scripture and experience are both given us by God. As the ships coming up our river by night are welcomed by light after light, so, if only we use it well, we have light enough to guide us through earth and into the desired haven.

We are all thinking just now about life and a happy life, and I want to tell you once more that the happiest life is that which, like Abel's, is given to God, and pleases God. You should have a real ambition to be not among the best of the bad, or the worst of the good, but to have such a grand life as Abel's. Let us draw close to his altar, and get at the secret of his beautiful life. We find it in

I. Abel's Offerings.

II. Abel's Firstlings.

III. Abel's Fatlings.

Study

I. *Abel's Offerings.*

They were the offerings of true faith. Living faith makes an Abel; the want of it, a Cain. Yet the two professed the very same faith. The other day, a little boy at breakfast offered me an egg. I took it, and broke it; and what a merry laugh arose at my expense. It was only an empty shell turned upside down. It had the form and fair outside of a real egg, and nothing more: it was a cheating *formalist*. Cain had the form; Abel had the form and the heart of faith. By this faith he believed God's Word; he received God's gifts; he trusted in God; he yielded himself to God; he lived the life God wanted him to live; and in all things he took God's will for his own. Faith thus made him the man he was. Though dead, he yet speaks to us of the true faith, without which we cannot please God. This faith is first a receiver, and then a giver. Abel, having received from God all but his sin, made an offering of himself—soul and body—to God; and then brought his offerings to God's altar. For every true offerer begins by offering himself. Abel, having begun with the whole, came to the parts, his gifts. He brought these gifts, not as a sordid bribe to his Creator—that is what the heathens do; nor as a sin-offering to take away his guilt—that is what self-righteous folk do; but

all his gifts were thank-offerings to show his gratitude to the God of his salvation. Now, watch him standing between the altar and his fat lambs. He takes things that are his own—he lifts them up, and lays them upon the altar. The moment they touch the altar they are not his but God's, or rather his only that he may make them God's: they are sacred to God.

What of my very own am I in Abel's style laying upon God's altar at this New Year? I am receiving millions of gifts from God. What gifts am I giving back to God? Is there any fairness between what I get and what I give back? It would take a very big book to explain all the offerings you might bring to God. Take care that they are not like the offerings God so often complains of in the Old Testament—defiled, maimed, halt, and blind. You should bring some of your own money. Abel's offerings were worth much money. "Apportion your charity to your estate," says an old writer, "or God may apportion your estate to your charity." Better to live richly than to die rich. Praise is an offering you can easily give, and which God greatly prizes when it springs from free grateful love.

Raphael paints St. Cecilia, the patroness of music, as listening to the singing of angels, which has suddenly burst upon her ear. Her musical instruments (as you see in the picture on page 17) lie broken at her feet, and her organ is slipping from her hands: she feels earth's music to be a poor jarring thing compared with the heavenly strains. It is well to have a love for all good music, for it has power to soothe the mind and

sweeten life, but its best praise is that it can be turned into true worship. Be sure that you feel the charms of the music that celebrates God's love to men. Of all our offerings, praise is most like the offerings of the saints in heaven; and it will help to make your earthly life heavenly. Say, then, with the returning Israelites, "So will we render the calves of our lips" (Hosea xiv. 2).

But all good works for Christ and man are true offerings, and every Christian wishes to bring them to God's altar every day of his life. God asks you and yours: the offerer first, then his offerings. Though your offerings may be very poor and cold, if you bring them in simple faith, they will burst into flame when touched by the coals of this altar.

Abel's offerings were

II. *Firstlings.*

That is, first ones, the first-born of his flock. He brought offerings as early as he could, for he hated delay. Abel-like, bring you

The firstlings of life. Bring the first you can give. Why put off? You can never have a really happy life till you come to Christ. He gives you only what is good, and takes from you only what is vile. He hates nothing in your nature but your sin. Will you miss all this, or be willing to go without it for years? Christmas cards and boxes have been coming to you. Do you say when they arrive, "Oh, there's no hurry; they can stand for a little: after a while I'll open them



ST. CECILIA LISTENING TO THE SINGING OF ANGELS

out"? Even in church you laugh at the bare mention of such a thing. Why, when the postman brings these presents, you are neither to hold nor to bind—you dance with impatience till you get them into your own hands. A friend gives you a watch or a pair of skates as a New Year's gift. When they arrived at your house, did you ever say, "Oh, take them to the garret, and let them quietly gather dust and rust. It will do to look at them five minutes before I die"? When you were offered your Christmas holidays, did you cry and say, as if your heart were breaking, "Oh, don't speak to me of a holiday; for I am very young: wait till I am five-and-forty"? The fact is, that you won't put off anything from which you expect joy. In all such matters, the rule with you is *the firstlings*. Yet many boys in Christian homes are like Colonel Gardiner and Bishop Hannington, both of whom had a secret persuasion that religion was true, and that they must one day yield, though they quieted their consciences by vowing that they would be Christians when they grew older.

I was reading the lives of the Earl of Shaftesbury, and of Robert Hall, the famous preacher. The earl gave himself to Christ in his seventh year. When everybody was praising Robert Hall, his old nurse said, "I will answer for it that my dear Bobby knew the Lord before he was seven years of age." These two boys brought their firstlings to God's altar. Let the first ripe fruits of your harvest be for the Lord. Most bitterly do many Christian men and women regret that

they did not come to Christ till they had no firstlings to bring. "Oh that my spiritual birthday had been when I was a little child," sighed a dying mother; "my life might all have been for God." I have read that a well-known nobleman, who was converted in old age, used to say to his friends, "My soul is saved, but my life is lost." The law is, "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits" (Exod. xxii. 29).

You should also bring to the altar

The firstlings of this New Year: its first hours and thoughts and feelings. The lives of Christians tell us that the New Year was a great time with many of them. One and another were converted then. As the old year was dying a gentle voice whispered in their souls some simple truth that roused and touched them. They thus had a New Year indeed, quite unlike any of the old years; for in it they began the new life. I have just received a letter from one of our girls, telling me in beautiful and touching words that at this New Year she has begun to follow Christ. Then, many who were good Christians before, at the New Year give themselves anew to Christ. Some, you know, hold special services for this purpose. Long ago many old-fashioned Christians used to make covenants with God at this season in as full and business-like a way as they made their wills. We should have at least the spirit of consecration and covenanting, and now bind ourselves with new and delightful bonds to the person and service of Jesus Christ. Be like our shipbuilders when they begin building a new ship: lay now, fair and square,

without a twist, the keel of a good life; and be ever building it up in its beauty on both sides—the side facing God, and the side facing man.

Of course, each day is a little life, one of the pennies that make the pounds; and you must try to give to God the firstlings of each day also. I have just come across an Icelandic child's morning prayer, which I think very beautiful:—

“Now I am clothed, and stand upright,
Jesus, guard me in Thy might.
By God's grace, oh, grant to me
To pass this day as pleaseth Thee.”

“A happy New Year to you” is now on many lips. You will have the reality itself—a life spent not in the frown but in the smile of God—if, like Abel, you bring to the Lord the firstlings of your heart and of the New Year. Why willingly miss the good of life when it is within your easy reach? God has made it our duty to be happy: He finds His glory in our happiness, so that we cannot please Him without being pleased ourselves. Christ's is a religion of peace, of brightness, of love and joy—it is the soul's jubilee. What an idea that Christ's service is a thing of sour severities. Why, the Bible bids us delight ourselves in God, as if delighting were the whole duty of man. The family motto of Dr. Doddridge was “Live while you live.” By turning it into poetry he formed what Dr. Samuel Johnson calls “one of the finest epigrams in the English language:”—

"Live while you live, the epicure would say,
And seize the pleasures of the passing day.
Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,
And give to God each moment as it flies.
Lord, in my view let both united be :
I live in pleasure when I live in Thee."

How very different is the tone of those who begin life without Abel's faith and firstlings. On his thirty-third birthday, Lord Byron wrote—

"Through life's dull road, so dim and dirty,
I have dragg'd to three and thirty.
What have these years left to me ?
Nothing except thirty-three."

And Hartley Coleridge wrote the following lines on the fly-leaf of his Bible—

"When I received this volume small,
My years were barely seventeen,
When it was hoped I should be all
Which once, alas ! I might have been.

And now my years are thirty-five,
And every mother hopes her lamb,
And every happy child alive,
May never be what I *now* am."

From among our firstlings we should choose

III. *Our Fatlings.*

Abel carefully picked out for his offerings the fattest of his lambs, kids, and calves. Like him, bring to God's altar the flower of your flock, the best of your

best of everything. As nothing is too great for God to give you, so nothing should be too great for you to give to God. You should not keep the fatted calf for strangers. The truth is, that the goods of this life are not really your own till you have given them to God. What a blessed thing to offer to the Saviour all the powers of an unpolluted youth, of an unblighted heart. In your home life, in your school life, in your social life, in your church life, let your rule be—"The firstlings of the flock and the fat thereof."

Some twelve years ago I was lecturing upon Abel. At the close I appealed to the young in words like these—"Some do not take Abel's way. All that is finest, fullest, and fairest they give to the devil. Then when they are old and broken-down; when their blood is thin and they are ready to die; when sin can give them no more pleasure, and has left them next to no heart to give, they creep to Christ with their last, and their leanest, and their leavings. The poor outcasts of the world, and almost the outcasts of the devil, they offer themselves to God not a 'living' but a dying sacrifice. Wonderful to tell, Christ does not scorn the poor dregs of their wasted lives. But their godless companions often scorn them cruelly, yet not so cruelly as they scorn themselves. Such behaviour is not only very sinful and very foolish—it is also very mean, very shabby, and very base. Will you ever treat God and Christ in that way?"

The next evening a young woman, a stranger, called upon me. I greatly admired her frankness and hearti-

ness. This was her story. "I had a godly upbringing in the country, but I came to a godless house in Glasgow, where all the religion that was in me was taken out of me. I felt that I was just a heathen when I came over here last week. I am now a servant in a house near your church. I got out last Sunday, and I thought that I would go into the nearest church, and see what like it was. I had the notion that it was a Roman Catholic Church, but I did not care what it was. All you said went in at the one ear and out at the other till you came to the close of your sermon. You then said that some young folk gave their youth to sin, and hoped to come to Christ in old age. My head then went down on the book-board, and I said to myself, 'That's God's truth, and that's me, and nothing can be more mean and shabby.' Thoughts of my praying mother came rushing into my heart and melted me, and I resolved, there and then, that my sinful and mean life, by God's help, would end from that hour."

A few nights afterwards she came to me with a young woman, and said, "This is the only companion I have in Glasgow. Last Monday night, I went straight from you to her, and told her all I had said to you, and she has resolved to begin the Christian life along with me."

Again she called and said, "I wish to come to the Lord's Supper." "We celebrate it," I said, "a month hence, and again in three months. When do you wish to come?" She made a beautiful reply: "Oh, if you

please, it's the firstlings with me now: I would like to come to the first communion." She and her companion both came, and since then she has drawn others to our church, and for many years she constantly brought offerings of devout worship to this altar where she was moved by the story of Abel's firstlings and fatlings.

A bright boy of twelve listened to this sermon. His mother asked him some questions about it at dinner-time, and then said, "Are you going to do the mean and shabby thing?" In a firm tone he at once replied, "No, mother, I never will."

Will you do the mean and shabby thing? Your heart replies—does it not?—with a round and rousing No.

CHAPTER III.

THE RAINBOW.

"And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations : I do set My bow in the cloud."—GEN. ix. 12.

THE objects used in the Bible for lessons are simple, and such as are often seen by everybody except the blind. They are like the rainbow which fills the whole sky, and is seen as easily by the child as by the philosopher. This is one reason why the Bible is so popular and so easily understood : it brings truth within reach of the senses, while its rich sign-language delights the imagination, and it invites us to enter the temple of truth through the gate that is called Beautiful. It is thus a book for the millions. If we adopt its methods of teaching the whole world may become a Bible to us, full of parables, pictures, and doctrines. As the Bible has so many object-lessons, we may, in any part of the world, gain or recall much sacred learning without books. For the lessons and objects are linked together in our minds, so that many of the things we see and handle body forth to our eyes the truths of the Gospel. Whenever, for example, you see the rainbow, you are reminded of God's covenant of

love with man, and the peace-speaking bow becomes a means of grace to you.

The object here is large. It has two parts, and suggests a third. These are

- I. The Storm-cloud.
- II. The Rainbow.
- III. The Sun.

I. *The Storm-cloud.*

Every rainbow has a dark cloud for its background. That big cloud is here a sign of wonder and fear, as the rainbow is a sign of hope. The first pages of the Bible teach us the awfulness of sin, and of God's holy anger against sin. The vast objects teaching this lesson rise before the Bible-reader as the pyramids rise above the plain of Egypt. Think of the driving of Adam and Eve out of Paradise, of the flaming sword above the gate, of Cain's flight, of Sodom and Gomorrha, of the flood, and of this black judgment-cloud covering the affrighted world. All these are monuments of the evil of sin, and they tell us of judgment to come. They are "an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly" (2 Pet. ii. 6), and they have roused many to flee from their sins. They are as the red signals along the line at night to warn of danger ahead. They declare as with a voice of thunder that he who sins must suffer for his sin. But do not forget that all the words in the Bible that make you tremble are spoken in tenderest mercy. To a guilty conscience

God's frown, like a big cloud, shuts out the sun and covers the whole earth with gloom. You should not try to shut this lesson out of your mind ; for I am sure that we all need it, as many things are apt to weaken our sense of sin. And then the dark background adds to the brightness of the glorious hues of the rainbow. Grace is so gracious because it conquers even sin : the rainbow is so very beautiful because it seems to spring out of the bosom of the fearful cloud.

I have read that when the ancient Jews saw a rainbow they confessed their sins. We Gentiles should also learn this first lesson from the rainbow, for its lesson of grace will be quite lost upon us unless we have felt and confessed our sins. The Gospel in both the Testaments is for sinners, and for nobody else.

From the terrifying symbol of sin and wrath we gladly turn to the sweet token of hope and mercy.

II. *The Rainbow.*

It is a great event in a child's life when, for the first time, he sees a rainbow. What a strange joy the sight gives ! Wordsworth's lines are quoted so often because they state a happy fact that belongs to the life of every child :—

“ My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky :
So was it when my life began ;
So is it now I am a man ;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die ! ”

In all ages men have spoken in rapture of the rainbow. "It is indeed truly a heavenly messenger, and so unlike anything else that it scarcely seems to belong to this world." Ancient nations sang hymns when they saw it. They were not only smitten with its beauty, but they rejoiced in it as a sign that the storm was past, and that they were about to enjoy the sweet and serene sunshine after the rain. Pliny declares that wherever the rainbow's foot rests the flowers are made much sweeter; and Aristotle says that it breeds honey-dew. The poet Thomson tells how the rainbow appears to the swain:—

"He wondering views the bright enchantment bend,
Delightful, o'er the radiant fields, and runs
To catch the falling glory."

The old Scandinavians said that it was a bridge uniting heaven and earth. They also seem to have had a dim idea that it was a sacred symbol. All have striven to do justice to its exceeding beauty of form and colour. The Greeks and Romans gave it the name of Iris, and said that it was the messenger of heaven, beaming with joy, youth, beauty, and love. They gave the same name of Iris to the brilliant sword-lily, and to that wonderful part of the eye that gives it its colour. In the same spirit the poet Morris says—

"As from the storm
The unearthly rainbow draws its myriad hues,
And steeps the world in fairness."

To us it is the messenger of heaven in a far grander

sense than the ancients dreamt of; for God has made it a preacher of kindness to man, and it has heavenly things to tell us. The Jewish Rabbis said that the white in the rainbow represented God's grace; the red His wrath; and the blue His mercy as the pillar between them. These colours do not stand apart in hostile isolation, but together form the symbol of peace. It is a memorial that God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but that He wishes all men to be saved.

As Wendell Holmes puts it—

“ Our midnight is Thy smile withdrawn,
Our noontide is Thy gracious dawn,
Our rainbow-arch Thy mercy's sign,
All, save the clouds of sin, are Thine.”

The Gospel is no cuckoo-song or parrot's cry: it is offered to us in hundreds of attractive symbols. God here chooses as the sign of His covenant the object that yields the greatest delight to our eyes; for beauty is the fitting garment of truth. He wishes everything about the Gospel to be glad, and sweet, and radiant. Hence *evangelising* is the New Testament word for preaching the Gospel, and that means to declare as an angel; to *angel well*, or *angel forth*. Good news diffuses brightness upon every person and thing connected with it.

De Quincey tells that when a boy, about the time of the battle of Waterloo, he travelled in the mail-coach from London to the country. They carried the good news of a great victory. Horses, men, carriages, all were gay with oak-leaves, laurels,

flowers, and ribbons. The guards that day wore their royal liveries, which they exposed to view, without any covering of upper coats. The hearts of all on the coach were dilated by their personal connection with the glad tidings. All reserve and social distinctions melted away in the common joy. One heart, one pride, one glory made gentle and simple, rich and poor, feel that they were all brothers and sisters. The news kindled like fire racing along a train of gunpowder. Rolling volleys of cheers ran along the highway. The beggar, forgetting his lameness, stood erect, and smiled: the victory had healed him, and said to him, Be thou whole. When changing horses, De Quincey told the news to a market-woman, who threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him for very joy.

We all feel that every symbol of good news should be clothed with radiance, and this helps us to understand why the rainbow is the herald of God's covenant of love. As Campbell puts it—

“Triumphal arch, that fill’st the sky

When storms prepare to part,

I ask not proud Philosophy

To teach me what thou art.

And yet, fair bow, no fabling dreams,

But words of the Most High,

Have told why first thy robe of beams

Was woven in the sky.

When o’er the green undeluged earth

Heaven’s covenant thou didst shine,

How came the world’s gay fathers forth

To watch thy sacred sign!

And when its yellow lustre smiled
O'er mountains yet untrod,
Each mother held aloft her child
To bless the bow of God.

As fresh in yon horizon dark,
As young thy beauties seem,
As when the eagle from the ark
First sported in thy beam.

For, faithful to its sacred page,
Heaven still rebuilds thy span ;
Nor lets the type grow pale with age
That first spoke peace to man."

A covenant is a solemn union between two ; and covenants among men and boys have their tokens.

I have been reading an account of his boyhood by a friend of mine. When his home-leaving came, his bosom friend walked with him to the shore. They cut a sixpence in two, and each took the half of it. They agreed that that half-sixpence would be the sign and seal of their changeless affection, and of their hope of renewing in heaven joys broken here.

When a Christian sees a rainbow in the sky, his heart should leap up and lay hold of it as the pledge of God's faithfulness and mercy that over-arch our earth. That thing of beauty should be a joy to his heart, and a means of grace.

It takes two to make a covenant, and God and you are the two. You must choose the covenant, and consent to all its terms, and bind yourself to it with right hearty goodwill, or rather, as an old preacher says, with ten thousand goodwills. You are not asked to

face an impossible task, like the little boy in the story, who fancied that if he got to the foot of the rainbow, he could by it climb up to heaven, and who ran on till breath failed. God's Spirit begets the yielding, consenting mood in all who pray for His aid. Here is the form of a "Covenant with God," which has been used by many.

COVENANT WITH GOD.

I TAKE

God the Father to be my God (1 Thess. i. 9).
 Jesus Christ to be my Saviour (Acts v. 31).
 The Holy Ghost to be my Sanctifier (1 Pet. i. 2).
 The Word of God to be my Rule (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17).
 The People of God to be my People (Ruth i. 16).

I GIVE

Myself—all I am, and all I have—to the Lord (Rom. xiv. 7, 8).
 And I do this *Deliberately* (Josh. xxiv. 15).
 Sincerely (2 Cor. i. 12).
 Freely (Psalm cx. 3).
 And *For ever* (Rom. viii. 35-39).

Name

Address

To God's Covenant proposed to us in the Gospel you must say "I will," or "I won't:" yes or no. The choice you make, makes you. Character is a choice ripened to maturity.

Blackadder, one of the Scottish martyrs, was one day, in an open-air sermon, appealing to all his hearers to accept and close with God's Covenant of Mercy. A woman cried out, "Hold your hand, sir, I give my consent." Her words referred to the custom among country folks of concluding a bargain by shaking hands over it.

Has your heart given its consent? Or, to use another emblem from the flood, pray that your soul may not be like the raven, that unclean bird, but like the deluge-dove which found in Noah's Ark the rest and home it had sought for in vain elsewhere.

Perhaps we might also say that the rainbow, as it spans the weary earth with its arch of beauty, is also a token of the union of all men in Christ's holy brotherhood. The rainbow, according to the Edda, is a three-coloured bridge between heaven and earth.

Shortly after Strassburg had been taken in the terrible war between France and Germany, there arose a great storm out of which sprang a beautiful rainbow, with one foot resting on Germany and the other on France. It seemed as if God then set His bow in the clouds to rebuke the cruel strife, and also as a sign of the good time coming when men shall learn war no more. As we have one God, and one Covenant with its one token in the sky, so there should be one family over all the earth.

If you learn these lessons, the rainbow will have for you a light that never shone on sea or land. You will prize the bow in the cloud as God's good gift to your

senses, helping your weak mind and memory to take a firm hold of heavenly things.

“Favoured John a rainbow saw
 Circling round the throne above ;
Hence the saints a pledge may draw
 Of unchanging covenant love :
Clouds a while may intervene,
But the bow shall still be seen.”

Where does the rainbow come from? you ask. The answer is, from

III. *The Sun.*

“The rainbow,” one of the learned says, “is the sun’s triumph over the floods; the glitter of his beams imprinted on the rain-cloud as a token of subjection.” The rainbow is made up of the rain-drop and the sunlight: it is formed when the rain-drop leaves the cloud and catches the sun’s rays. Hence waterfalls often have rainbows. The meeting of the spray and the sunshine creates these splendid visions. While we enjoy the rainbow on the cloud, we enjoy much more the victorious sunshine which comes to us after the floods have spent themselves. When the sun shines forth, the clouds with their silver edges part to let the trembling blue sky shine through them, and soon both cloud and rainbow melt away, and leave no trace in the glorious sky, which presents to our gaze the all-conquering sun.

Thus we rise in our teaching from shadow to substance, from the perishing to the imperishable. While

the Bible chooses for its lessons objects that appear in every age, all these objects pass away, like

“The rainbow’s lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm.”

As the rainbow disappears in the sunshine that created it, so all Old Testament types disappear in Jesus Christ, from whom they came. We have thus a fuller light than Noah had. The two men carrying the bunches of Eshcol grapes are like the saints of the Old and New Testaments: he that went before could not see the grapes so plainly as he that came after, though both felt quite sure of their existence. Thank God for your ampler light, and bathe your being in it, and so you shall grow in the life divine.

The favourite objects with the Church on earth are not forgotten in heaven, though in heaven they have dropped off all the stains of earth. Never on earth do you find a rainbow without its cloud, not even around our waterfalls; but in heaven the cloud has vanished while the rainbow remains. John (Rev. iv. 3) saw a rainbow as the chief part of the regalia of Christ’s throne, and its beauty added to the joys of heaven. There it is the token of the everlasting covenant of grace perfected in glory.

O Lord, giver of grace and glory, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee.



CHAPTER IV.

THE BURNING BUSH.

"I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt."—EXOD. iii. 3.

"The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush."—DEUT. xxxiii. 16.

HERE we have the greatest teacher, a great scholar, a great sight, and a great truth. You are a scholar of God as Moses was—the big bell has rung for you, and God has called you too by name; and a good scholar you shall be if you have Moses' spirit.

His *attention* was splendid. He looked and looked again; he halted; he turned aside; he stood still; he filled eyes and mind with the amazing object; he pondered it in his heart.

The first word for soldiers and scholars is *attention*. The word means a *stretching forth towards*, as of the little nestlings when they crane their necks over the edge of the nest for their food. The true scholar continues attending, for great truths are printed upon our minds as pictures are printed upon paper by chromolithograph. Each colour is printed by itself, so that there are some fourteen printings before the whole picture is conveyed to the paper. In the same way it takes time to impress any great truth upon our minds. Ideas are like chemicals: they need time and heat to tell. It is astonishing how much any child can learn when he attends with patience. The pity is that the preacher would often need to find words and ears too, for the heart is apt to play truant when God is the teacher.

Wonder and curiosity were strong in Moses as he said, "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." The Bible invites you into a wonderland of grace and truth. Thoughtful wonder is the mother of knowledge: it moves you, as it moved Moses, to ask the reason why.

"Far seen across the sandy wild,
Where, like a solitary child,
He thoughtless roam'd and free;
One towering thorn was wrapt in flame—
Bright without blaze it went and came:
Who would not turn and see?"

Holy fear was strong in Moses as he put off his shoes from off his feet (ver. 5). To go barefoot in the East is a mark of humility.

“The shepherd talks with God apart,
And, as he talks, adores.”

When you are learning the great things of God and the soul, you too are on holy ground, and should then put off the sandals of the soul—those soiled thoughts that come to our spirits from touching the world. And do not draw too near: have the sweet awe that fears to profane holy things. Some folks have little reverence, and come too near the mystic bush, so that their finer feelings are blackened and scorched by the fire. They grow rudely familiar with things divine.

Humble obedience was the fruit in Moses of this great object-lesson, for, at God's bidding, he went straight from the bush to Pharaoh. You learn all your lessons ill unless they make you obedient to the voice of God.

If you have these four marks—attention, wonder, holy fear, and humble obedience—you may claim to be among the schoolfellows of Moses; and like him, with your eyes full upon it, you will learn the lessons of the burning bush. Make this bush, then, for half-an-hour, the home of your thoughts. It is the first plant-emblem of the Jewish people as a whole.

Holy Spirit, be Thou our teacher, while we study

- I. The Bush.
- II. The Bush burning.
- III. The Bush unburnt.

I. *The Bush.*

It was one of the common stunted growths you may see to-day in the desert: some root out of a dry ground: a bramble-bush, or heath, or thorny acacia, or tamarisk: one of the humblest of living shrubs, quite unlike the cedar, the oak, or the palm. And this child of the desert, without stateliness or grace, is a picture of the cause of God and Church of Christ, so far as the outward eye can see. How small the Church in Egypt then was compared with Egypt's idolatry. The Egypt of that day has been made to live before us by famous discoveries, and by books like those of Dr. Ebers, which wonderfully light up some pages of the Bible. In the museum at Cairo, the Pharaohs, with whom the Israelites had to do, grin at you from their mummy-cases. You may see their photos in the shop windows. Egypt's idol temples were then, as they still are in their ruins, among the wonders of the world, and enormously rich. Their idol-worship was most gorgeous, and upheld by all the power of the State. Jehovah's worship by its side was like a solitary heath-bush in a forest of the cedars of Lebanon.

What a very small cause Christ's seemed when He died on the Cross! How majestically Pagan Rome overshadowed it! During the first three centuries there are only some ten or twelve short and scornful notices of Christ's Church in all the books of heathen writers; and yet soon after that the Church hurled heathen Rome from its throne, and conquered the world.

When wandering over the enormous ruins of Ephesus, and gazing at its vast theatre, of which we read in Acts xix., I thought how poor Christ's cause in Ephesus must have seemed in Paul's day, and how invincible Diana's! Yet to-day in the whole world there is not one Demetrius to speak a good word for Diana, while millions adore Jesus Christ. Why, Christianity was first brought to Europe by Paul and Silas. When they crossed over in a miserable sailing boat, they were so poor, I can believe, that they could scarcely between them raise money to pay their fare: all their baggage amounted probably to only two old cloaks and some parchments. These two men were the whole of Christ's Church in Europe to begin with. But God was with them, and they conquered so completely that to-day you cannot find in the wide world one man or woman or child who bows before any of the gods or goddesses who then had dominion over all mankind, with the exception of Jewry. All these idols have passed away for ever. Think also of the handful of unknown missionaries who first brought the Gospel to Britain when all the Britons were painted savages. Think of our own Columba and his little crazy coracle that carried the fortunes of Christ's Church, so far as our ancestors were concerned. The bush surely teaches that the Church should not try to out-Cæsar Cæsar in earthly pomp, that we should not be eager to wed worldly grandeur to the things of Christ, and that we should never despair of the day of small things in our foreign missions. That lowly bush in the

desert is the emblem of the kingdom of God in its beginnings.

Notice now

II. *The Bush burning.*

"The bush burned with fire" (ver. 2), that is, it burned fiercely with real fire. It was no make-believe or pictured flame; the bush was steeped in fire. Horeb means "dry," that is, the parched desert. The shrubs there are good for burning, and in summer they are like tinder. Almost the only trade there to-day is in charcoal, which the Arabs make out of such bushes as Moses saw. The Bedawin of Sinai have to pay their taxes to the Egyptian Government in charcoal. This is the only coal known in Bible lands, and the making of it is now, as it always has been, a very important industry. In some places the Arabs have no other way of earning money, and one village is called "the mother of charcoal." Small pieces of it are burnt on a brazier. It was around such "a fire of coals" that Peter and the servants of the high priest sat when he denied the Lord. It is to these David refers when he speaks of "coals of juniper." The traveller often meets Arabs on their way to Alexandria leading camels laden with charcoal; and he has to take care lest the bulky burdens on the camels' sides should come too near him.

The blazing fire in the bush was a symbol of the fierce persecution of Israel by Pharaoh; for God says (v. 7), "I have surely seen the affliction of My people."

Men often speak of the fires of persecution. The burning bush is thus the emblem of many churches of the martyrs. Sometimes the words are added, *Ardens sed virens*—"Flaming, yet flourishing;" or more frequently, *Nec tamen consumebatur*—"Yet it was not consumed." The same idea is represented by one of the emblems of the Waldensian Church, which is the lily among thorns—a lily (as you see in our picture) untorn and undeflowered amid the thorns that threaten to destroy it.



Since the days of Pharaoh, and indeed of Cain, the Church has had many persecutors who kindled in the bush a fire which they expected to devour it quite. When the Church grew strong and worldly, she persecuted in her turn; but, in so far as she did that, she ceased to be the true Church of Christ. You should read the story of the persecutions of the early Christians under the Cæsars, and of other persecutions since then. It will do you good, for it will show you how much Christian faith and love have suffered for Christ, and it will make you ashamed of your want of courage in His service. It should also make you thankful that all you know about bloody persecution has been gathered from books. You should also read the story of the planting of the Gospel in our own island. Our ancestors were every whit as savage as any of the heathen in the world to-day, and it seemed quite impossible that Christ's Church could live among them. In spite

of all, the sacred bush still flourishes among us. The heathen now in other lands show us what Britons once were, and British Christians show us what the heathen may become.

Behold now

III. *The Bush unburnt.*

"The bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Like the sun above him, it blazed, but was unconsumed. This is the great miracle of history. Egypt, Persia, Tyre, Rome—all the great nations of antiquity have been burnt down, but the bush lives. Yet thousands of times it has seemed utterly impossible that the Church could live; and yet it lives to-day, is larger than it ever was, and is spreading over the world. All the forces of evil have done their worst against it, and have failed. And more than that, the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the Church. Their holy heroism has left a strong cheering light upon the paths of men. When the fires of persecution had, to all seeming, burnt the bush to the ground, it arose again, like the fabled phoenix, from its ashes. Some believe that the bush not burning is the bush consumed.

Smiles, in his book about the Huguenots, tells how an aged French Christian assured him that the Christianity of French Protestants would never be worth much till it had been again refined by the fires of persecution.

When Julian, the Roman Emperor, was doing his utmost to overthrow the Church, and erect the idols upon its ruins, the rhetorician Libanus, the friend of

Julian, in scorn asked a Christian, "What is your Carpenter of Nazareth doing now?" "He is making a coffin," was the quiet reply. Ere long Julian was in the coffin, and all the idols he had set up were swept away. It is said that with his dying breath he cried out, "O Galilean! thou hast conquered."

History records that the opposing empires fell one upon another to form a pedestal whereon to build the Church. Christ's Church was like a pine on the rocks near a foaming river, which shakes only the shadow, while its spray nourishes the leaves of the tree. In spite of all its errors and failures, the Church still lives and thrives. When we think of the very humble infancy of the Church, of the enormous power and cruelty of its foes, and the poor lives of most Christians, the wonder is that the Church has held out for two thousand years, though when we remember that it is Christ's Church, the wonder is that it has not had a grander history.

"The good-will of Him who dwelt in the bush" is the reason why the burning bush is unburnt. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early" (Ps. xlv. 5). Christ has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." These words should calm our fears, and should make us hopeful of the future of Christ's cause on the earth. Surely God's side must be the winning side. We should sow broadcast the good seed in faith. You may count the acorns on the oak, but you cannot count the oaks that may be

in the acorn: you may know how many apples are on a tree, but you can never know how many trees are in the apple.

The prophecies about the Church in both the Testaments make at least one thing very plain: in the most glowing language they enkindle the imagination, and fill the heart with deathless hope: they bid us believe that Christ's Church shall weather every storm, outlive every foe, and enjoy a glorious future. The keynote of them all is, that Messiah's "name shall endure for ever; and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed." This truth should not be faint or dim to you as you behold it imaged in the burning bush.

Thank God that a little child may share all the good things of this great kingdom, and do something to spread it throughout the world.

The visible Church in David's day was laden with many imperfections, yet David greatly loved it, and did his best for it. The visible Church in Paul's day was very far from what it should have been, yet Paul strove to make it worthier of its name; and so you, as you grow up, should gladly give what help you can to the sacred society that Christ has planted in the world. But you belong to the Church only in name, unless you behave like Moses before the burning bush. God gives us his biography in three words, "Moses, my servant." Like Moses, listen to God, choose God in youth, and remain faithful unto death. This blessedness be yours. Amen.

CHAPTER V.

THE TABERNACLE: ITS TEACHINGS.

"The first tabernacle . . . was a figure for the time then present."
—HEB. ix. 8, 9.

THE tabernacle in the wilderness was the greatest object-lesson in the Old Testament, and it was always before the eyes of the people. It was a wonderful collection of material pictures of spiritual things. It was a tent for the worship of God, every part of which was arranged with wonderful care, according to the pattern given by God to Moses. It had two apartments—the holy place, and the most holy place; and also a large enclosure of curtains held up by pillars. It was the heart of the camp in the wilderness, for all the tribes lay around it. It was their one rallying point. That fact itself was a parable, which taught that religion was the bond of union, that which binds into one sacred family those who, but for it, would be separated.

Every part of the tabernacle had a teaching power. It was a visible gospel, an illustrated creed, which taught doctrines by diagrams. When the Israelites settled in the Holy Land, the tabernacle found a stately home in the temple at Jerusalem; but all its

parts and teachings remained the same as in the wilderness. The temple was plundered by the Babylonians and Romans, who carried off its utensils and treasures. Let us carry off its spiritual treasures, and make its furniture all our own. God help us to study wisely this Gospel according to Moses, which makes all the great spiritual truths very plain to the eye. The tabernacle offers us hundreds of interesting things and niceties, but I will now bring before you only its greatest lessons. From the objects of the tabernacle three voices come to him who has an ear to hear them.

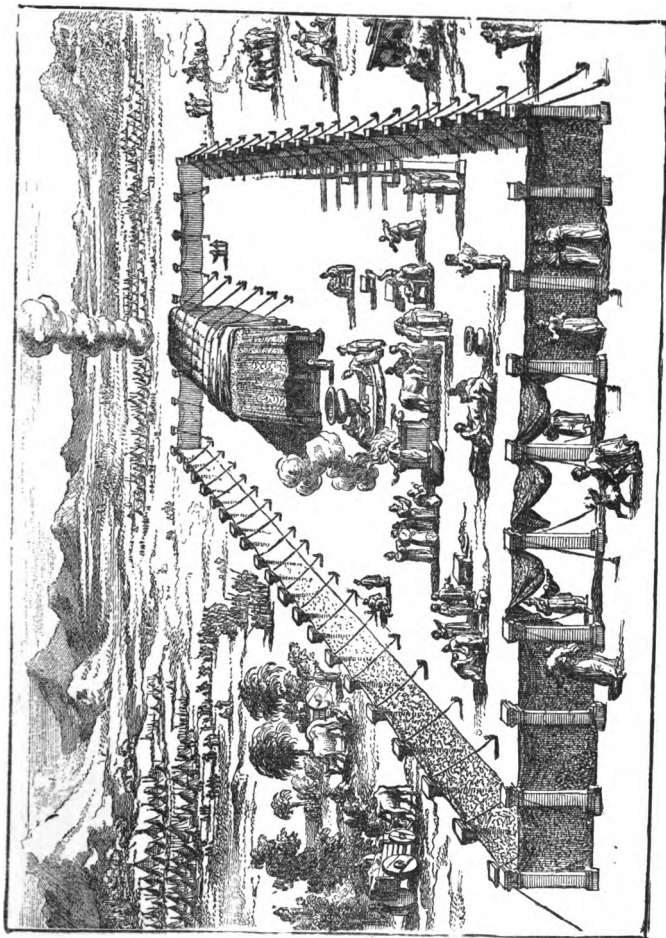
I. Thou hast sinned.

II. Thou mayest be saved.

III. Thou shouldest serve.

I. *Thou hast sinned.*

Place yourself in imagination alongside of an earnest Jewish worshipper, and try to enter into his feelings as he approaches the tabernacle. From every part of the tabernacle and its services a solemn voice says to him, "Thou art a sinner, and thy sin is an awful thing, and it makes thee unfit to worship God." That voice speaks the strongest conviction of his soul. He has the mood of a penitent sinner. He dares not go to God alone in his own name, and relying upon his own merits. He puts his case into the hands of the appointed priest, who approaches God in his stead. The priest comes to the enclosure around the tabernacle.



THE TABERNACLE.

It is not a fence, but a covering of tent-cloth. It is very easy to enter, and so he gently puts aside the loosely hanging curtain and passes within. There he stands face to face with the altar of burnt-offering. It stands right in front of the door, and is the largest piece of furniture belonging to the tabernacle: it is twice as large as the ark. It is the first article seen on entering, and the last on leaving. Without it all the other furniture were worthless. The priest who acts for the sinful worshipper must there offer up the sin-offering. That takes much time, so that its teachings sink deeply into the worshipper's heart. He is there taught that *all have sinned*. The priest, even the high priest, is a sinful man, and must be pardoned and purified before he can do the work of a priest. Among all the Israelites not one is found who does not need the atonement for sin. There are as many sinners as there are Israelites. And sin is a *deadly and vile thing*. Look at that victim on the altar. You hear its groans, you see its struggles, its streaming blood, its dying agony, the all-consuming flame upon the altar, and the dark cloud above it. It terrifies you: you shudder at the strange sight. But all that is an object-lesson upon the death due as the wages of sin. In other places and companies the Jew might think lightly of sin, and not trouble himself much about it; but every light feeling forsakes him when he stands near the altar. That solemn remembrancer of sin subdues his soul.

And his sin *must be confessed*, else there can be no

accepted worship. Every act of worship at the tabernacle began with the confession of sin. If a man had no sin, what had he to do there? What meaning had that priest for him? that altar? that mercy-seat in the inmost part of the tabernacle? all that ample provision for putting away sin? What is the use of an infirmary to those who have no sickness? What is the use of an academy of music to those who are perfectly deaf? And what sense is there in a sin-offering where there is no sin? You see that every part of the tabernacle and its services said to the Jew, "Thou hast sinned." The whole tabernacle was a sin-institution, and part of a sin-religion. Though it has long ago passed away from the earth, it still brings the same message to us. Confess your own sin as frankly as the Jew confessed his when he entered the door of the tabernacle. Be this the language of your heart—

" My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While as a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin."

The second voice from the tabernacle is

II. *Thou mayest be saved.*

Every part of the tabernacle breathed hope into the penitent Jew. What a world of trouble was taken with the temple, and all that at the command of God. Was all that to go for nothing? Every part of the service led up to the mercy-seat, and yet was there

no mercy for men? The tabernacle has much to tell us about the way of salvation.

1. *It is by a High Priest.* A priest is one who acts for men in the things of the soul; that he may loose men from their sins and bring them to God (Heb. v. 1). A priest has to do with sinners only: the holy angels have no priest, Adam unfallen had no priest. The high priest did for the sinner what he could not do for himself, and he did all that needed to be done for him. He made atonement for him, and appeared for him before God, so that every barrier between the sinner and God's mercy was taken away. That high priest in the tabernacle is in many things a portrait of Jesus Christ. He is our Priest, after the order of Melchisedek. He is His own ancestor and heir: there was none before Him, and there shall be none after Him: He stands quite alone without any helper: He is for Jew as well as Gentile, for He goes further back than Abraham, the first Jew: He is a King, and very mysterious, and His priesthood is unlimited in its area and duration.

2. In the tabernacle the mercy-seat was reached only by the altar upon which the sin-offering was laid. Without shedding of blood there was no remission. And that was a figure for the time then present, a shadow of the substance that was to come by-and-by. The sin-offerings in the tabernacle pictured what they could not of themselves perform, for they revealed rather than removed sin: they could not of themselves put away sin. Christ is our real

High Priest, and much more; for He is also the offering for our sins. He is the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, and He has done this by the one offering of Himself.

3. *Salvation is by intercession.* The high priest in the tabernacle was an intercessor, that is, one who *goes between*. When the sacrifice for sin had been made, he passed out of sight of all the people into the holy place, and through it into the holy of holies, where, in a figure, he appeared before God for the people. There, hid from the eyes of men, he offered the confessions of the people, and the sacrifice for their sins. Our High Priest likewise, having offered Himself for our sins, passed into heaven, the dwelling-place of mercy and righteousness, the home of God, of which the holy of holies was the symbol, where He still carries on the ministry of mercy He began on earth. Thus He is able to save unto the uttermost all who come to God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The tabernacle has passed away, and it was meant to pass away from the face of the earth, just as the beautiful blossom passes away when the precious fruit appears. Some wish to have in their worship as much of the tabernacle as possible, and so they have incense in their churches, and garments of sundry bright colours. They are mistaken. These things were but figures for the time then present, and were all to disappear when Christ had come. We are now to fasten our whole attention on our one High Priest,

and give no heed to any other. In the time of Christ, an army of about 20,000 priests belonged to the temple; but yet the one High Priest was enough for all the early Christians. It is a great pity that some ministers call themselves priests, for that name is not given to one apostle or minister in the New Testament: it is reserved for the Saviour.

I know a young man who heard a sermon one day on the text in 1 Tim. ii. 5—"There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." He listened eagerly, for he felt that he was all wrong in religion, and his Roman Catholic friends were telling him that he should go to the priest, and he would soon put that matter all right for him. He was just about to take their advice. The preacher showed that there was only one mediator in the New Testament, while the Roman Catholics had ever so many, and that if we had Christ as our Priest, we surely would not need any priest on earth to perfect His work. The young man said to himself, "That's common sense, and that's Scripture too. I shall have no priest but Christ, and that preacher shall be my spiritual guide." The Apostle leaves not one inch of room for any other priest. Christ is peerless, and all alone. All possible excellences centre in Him. He fills up the whole space between God and man. The Apostle never tires of the glory of our High Priest.

Now, my dear children, you may feel that you cannot understand all these things, but each of you may at least say this—"I am a sinner: I have no

doubt about that. I am not able to save myself, and I must have a Saviour. I cannot be saved by what I do for myself: I must be saved by what another has done for me: I dare not come to the holy God alone: I dare not think that my best deeds are good enough for Him. Christ offers to be my Saviour, and I just put myself into His hands. I trust in Him, and take His way in everything. I can't understand many things about the way in which He saves, or about His one offering for sin; but He is able and willing to save, and that is enough for me. In every way in which I can, I yield myself to Him." Be very sure that God's own mercy through Christ Jesus is not denied to any one who seeks it. The mercy-seat is always within your reach. It is not mercy fighting against justice, but mercy with justice at its very heart, for the tables of the law were kept safe under the lid of the mercy-seat. And it is God's mercy that is offered to you—mercy for the past, mercy for the present, mercy for the future, and mercy for eternity. In the temple, Gentiles were not allowed to pass beyond the outer court. Thirteen intimations were put up in front of it. On the opposite page you have an exact copy of the inscription. It means, "No stranger is to enter within the balustrade round the temple and enclosure. Whoever is caught will be responsible to himself for his death, which will ensue." One of these intimations carved in stone was discovered in 1871. Christ Himself probably often saw and read this very inscription, and I had the pleasure of seeing

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ΤΑΙΔΙΑΤΟΕΞΑΚΟΛΟΥ
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it in the museum at Constantinople. Paul probably refers to this very stone, or to the wall of which it was a part, when he says that Christ has "broken down the middle wall of partition" (Eph. ii. 14). Not even a curtain now remains between you, a Gentile, and the mercy-seat. You need not halt for a minute, as all things are now ready. The greatest sinner may draw near, and say with the publican, God show temple-mercy, or mercy at the mercy-seat, to me the sinner; for that is the meaning of his words.

These two great lessons about sin and salvation were plainly taught by the stones at the Gate of Susa, which led into the temple on the east side. The golden gate stands there now, and it was recently excavated. The old gate, like the present one, had a double portal. The one was called "the Gate of Repentance," and the other "the Gate of Mercy," and the name for the whole was "the Eternal Gate." The inner gate was called, as we learn from the New Testament, "the Beautiful Gate." What a splendid object-lesson in stone! We enter the temple by the Eternal Gate, whose two portals are Repentance and Mercy; and as we move nearer the centre, we pass through the gate called Beautiful. That outer gate, like our Shorter Catechism, makes one think of "a true sense of sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ."

III. The third voice from the tabernacle is, "*Thou shouldest serve.*" God's aim was that all the Israelites should be priests unto God. In the tabernacle, only

the priests could enter the holy place, and only the high priest the most holy place; but now all Christians, without the aid of any human priest, may come to the mercy-seat in the name of Jesus Christ. The Jewish high priest confessed his sin, and the sin of the people, at the great altar of burnt-offering, and there made atonement for sin. He then stepped forward to the laver in which he washed or *laved* himself. It was a great basin of brass, out of which pure fresh water was always flowing. That was a great object-lesson, and it taught that the pardoned must also be purified to fit them for the service of God. From the laver he stepped forward to the altar of incense within the holy place. On one side of it stood the golden candlestick, which was always lighted, and the table of shewbread. These two were symbols of the light and food we need for true service. Upon the golden altar of incense sweet fresh spices were always burning. Several verses (Ps. cxli. 2; Rom. xii. 1; Phil. iv. 18; Heb. xiii. 15, 16) tell us that these sweet smelling odours were figures of the grateful offerings which the pardoned sinner should bring to the God of his salvation. Spices were the most precious things in the East, and when in the fire they gave out the most agreeable perfumes.

We are to bring offerings of service to God's altar, and our offerings are not to be cold dead things. The flame of grateful love in our hearts is to make them all as the sweet spices upon the golden altar in the tabernacle. They are to

be like the incense in the tabernacle, which went up and was never taken back, which yielded a sweet smell to heaven, delighted all the bystanders, and made the very air wholesome. We are saved that we may serve; we worship God so that all our work may become as worship. We are to be like priests who have been set apart and consecrated for the work of God. The aim of our religion is to make us holy. The priests had to bathe every morning, and often, during the day, to wash their hands and feet in the brazen laver, and also to serve in white garments. Only the cleansed can serve God. The aim of Christ is to purge the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God (Heb. ix. 14). Ours is not to be the service of slaves, who are driven on by mere terror of the lash. God cannot accept the service in which the heart is not. Nor is it to be the service of hirelings, who work only for hire, and are glad when they have done with their tasks.

At the railway station you see automatic machines. You put in a penny, and get from them your penny-worth. Children's savings banks have been made on the same principle. When a child drops in a penny, he gets a *sweetie* as a reward. To serve God because that brings us some earthly good is not to serve Him at all. We must pray for grace to serve Him from love, and as His children. We are to delight to do His will, and to have His law within our hearts. And even in our sufferings we are to serve God as Christ did. Sufferers who patiently and cheer-

fully bear God's will are honoured among the best of His servants.

This is the sum of what I have said to you—the tabernacle teaches you three great lessons: thou hast sinned, thou mayest be saved, and thou shouldest serve. These are the three great lessons of the whole Bible. God's good Spirit write them upon our hearts and lives! Amen.



CHAPTER VI.

DAVID'S EVERGREEN.

"And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; his leaf also shall not wither ; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."—Ps. i. 3.

THE banks of the Jordan near Jericho are lined with oleanders (a flower of which surmounts this page), whose bright blossoms and dark green leaves give the place the appearance of a garden bordered by a plain which rears only scraggy brown shrubs. It is natural to fancy that the object-lesson in the

first Psalm was suggested by the oleanders on the brink of the Jordan. I say suggested, for the Psalmist's evergreen, unlike the oleander and our evergreens, is a fruit-bearer. To a Jew the Jordan was the river of rivers, and the sight on its banks at the spot nearest Jerusalem is one not likely to be forgotten, as the beauty of the evergreens here is greatly heightened by the barrenness of the neighbouring plain.

Your friends wish you to get out of life all the good you can, and to be among the best men and women under heaven. They wish each of you to be like David's evergreen, firmly rooted at the river's brink, always fair, and always flourishing. I want to show you how, by God's blessing, you may succeed in life; and I shall speak to you about both the homeliest and the highest things.

Success in life is our subject, and it has two parts—

I. The secret of success.

II. The crown of success.

I. *The secret of success.*

It is, I believe, threefold: *Shun strong drink, love your work, follow Christ.*

1. *Shun strong drink* as a beverage, shun it with your heart, shun it till your dying day. Thousands in our land began life as hopefully as you are doing, but, by reason of strong drink, they died miserably on a stair, or at a dyke back, or in the poorhouse; and

others in wealthy homes have had as sorrowful deaths. Our national intemperance may be likened to the Yellow River, which is called "China's Sorrow." Having no banks, it eats away the soft soil, and carries desolation along its course. The love of strong drink has made the lives of millions utter failures.

I can scarcely speak too strongly about what I have seen with my own eyes. It fares with the victim of strong drink as it does with the opium-eater. De Quincey was quite sure, as he tells us, that he could give up the opium whenever he wished. He felt like one who had wandered a little from a palace, whose open gates would welcome him back at any time. But here is his description of his effort to return—"I saw through vast avenues of gloom those towering gates of ingress which hitherto had always seemed to stand open, now at last barred against my retreat, and hung with funeral crape." He also likens himself to a man caught in a whirlpool who is carried away by a current from the centre, but suddenly finds that this current is but an eddy, wheeling round upon the maelstrom, and hurrying him into the jaws of destruction.

A friend and I were walking along the high cliffs in the north of Scotland. "Is that road safe in front of us?" we asked a herd-boy. "No," he replied seriously; "the farmer here was coming along it one day last year; he was tipsy, and he fell over, and was drowned." Pointing to a turnip-field, he said, "It will be safer for you to go by the end of the neaps there." Keep away from the precipice over which so many

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millions have fallen: keep on the broad, solid, safe field.

I was also told that a boy, one summer day, was chasing a butterfly in these fields. He took off his cap, and grew warm with the chase. The butterfly flew out towards the sea, and the boy, heedless of all else, ran on, fell over the cruel cliffs, and was drowned.

Many a young man is like that boy. The butterfly he chases is miscalled pleasure, and he foolishly hopes to find pleasure in strong drink. It is easier to chase the butterfly than to catch it; and the moment you catch it, its charm, and even its life, is gone. Hatred of strong drink will in many ways help you to success in life.

A youth called on me the other evening. Ten months ago he began as fourth engineer on board a steamer: now he is second engineer. "That's quick promotion," said I. "Yes," said he; "two of the engineers above me had to be dismissed for drinking."¹

That sort of thing is going on everywhere: intemperance is always creating vacancies for the temperate. Our national intemperance is a scandal to man, and enough to make angels weep. If David had lived in

¹ On the afternoon of the day on which I preached this sermon, this story was reported to a young man, who at once sent me a note, and requested me to repeat the story at a young men's meeting in the evening which I was to address, and he to attend. He wrote that he too was a fourth engineer on board a steamer, and that two of the officers above him lost no time in making themselves drunk whenever they reached a harbour. At the close of that meeting I was asked to take an interest in three young men, each of whom had brought himself to the edge of destruction by intemperance.

our country, I think he would probably have had these words in his first Psalm: "Blessed is the man that drinketh no strong drink." For your own sake, and for the sake of others, don't touch it. For "it is good . . . not to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. xiv. 21). Total abstinence takes out of your life one of the greatest sources of failure, and makes it possible for you to succeed. But you must also

2. *Love your work.* The boy who hates honest work, or whose study is to do as little as possible, is likely to go to the bad. It is hatred of work that chiefly fills our prisons and reformatories. Put your might into your work at school and after you leave school; put your heart and conscience into it; grow warm at it; and you will prosper in body, mind, and soul. Make the love of work one of your guardian angels. It will help to make a man of any boy, and a man of the grandest mould. It is a sure sign of a noble spirit.

Stanley and Schweinfurth, the African travellers, tell us that the inhabitants of the great forest in the heart of Africa are dwarfs and not men, because they have not sunshine, good food, or hard work. Your idler is always a dwarf of a man. Some foolish people do not know this. A Portuguese gentleman in Africa has the nail of his little finger uncut to show that he is above working with his hands.

Have a real ambition to be first rate at your work, and "to get to the top of your calling," whatever it is. How hugely interesting any bit of work grows

when you try to do it well, and always a little better. That takes out of work all its hardness, and brings you success. A Japanese ivory-carver was asked if he was not sorry to part with a beautiful work upon which he had spent many months. "No," was his fine reply, "for I hope to make my next work still more beautiful."

About the time of the Reformation, the great painters and sculptors did works that are among the wonders of the world. Among them a phrase sprang up that is often quoted. It was said that their masterpieces were produced *con amore*, that is, with love. A real love of their work made them as men inspired, and so they wrought with joy, and surpassed themselves and all other men. The true worker works with diligence. Diligence is the Latin word for love, or rather for love in happy action. Apart from their success altogether, greatly blessed are they who have a real love of their work. They are saved from the thousand snares in the path of the idler. Cupid used to complain that all his wiles failed to tempt the Muses, because they were always busy. To get honest work and do it is better than any earthly thing we can work to get.

"Do your best, do your best always, do your best in everything," was George Moore's secret of success. "Make yourself useful," another authority says, "and you will succeed." "Fear God and work hard," Dr. Livingstone said to a company of boys when he took farewell of Scotland.

"How is James S—— getting on?" I once asked a merchant about a boy in his warehouse. "Getting on!" he replied vigorously; "no fear of *him* getting on: that boy can't help getting on." Now listen, for his next words lay bare one of the great secrets of success—"He is as interested in everything about my warehouse as if it were all his own. It's a pleasure to have such a boy by one's side." That boy put his religion into his work: do you the same. You will then be able to say with Mackay of Uganda, "Duty before pleasure, but my duty is pleasure."

In our suburbs you often see a clump of trees that know not when glorious spring cometh: covered with soot, the bark hacked and ragged, the branches leafless. Thousands in our city are like these blighted trees. And the reason is, they love what they should hate, and hate what they should love: they love strong drink, and hate work. If you hate strong drink and love your work, success waits your winning.

Our Saviour was a village carpenter till His thirtieth year, and so supported Himself and probably His widowed mother. Thank God for the wondrous story of Christ's boyhood. It teaches you that honest work is a sacred thing. How it should cheer and fire every boy who has to work for his daily bread. "Poverty, then," he may well say to himself, "is no reproach, nor need it hinder me from doing the best service to God and man."

"Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work." Have you ever noticed that these words command

week-day labour before the Sabbath rest? You are to sanctify the Sabbath by holy rest, and the other days by hearty work. God has given you a bit of work which is your own, and which nobody else can do—"thy work;" and you are to work so well that in the six days you'll do the whole week's work—"all thy work," and leave none of it over to the Sabbath, or the next week. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccles. ix. 10).

3. *Follow Christ* is the third secret of success in life, and it carries in its bosom all the others. For you may gain earthly success, and yet your life may be an eternal failure. A man may slave for money and earthly fame, and may give his life and soul for them. Success is not that which brings the greatest happiness to the five senses, for any day you may have to live without your five senses. The millionaire may feel keenly on his death-bed that his life has been an utter failure. I never heard of a shroud with a pocket in it, for the dead rich man cannot take his money with him to give him a start in the other world: such an idea has found a home only among the most benighted heathens. True success must thus embrace both our life on earth and the life to come. You feel sure that you would not wish to face death and judgment with nothing but earthly success in your right hand.

He follows Christ who has *faith in Christ* and *faithfulness to Christ*. "But I have faith in Christ," you say; "I am not a young infidel." "Yes; but what good does your faith do you? Is it a living or a dead thing?"

At the battle of Waterloo, Nathan Meyer Rothschild was in a shot-proof tent, with a swift horse saddled and bridled by his side. At sunset he peered over the battlefield, and saw our soldiers sweeping the French before them. "Hurrah!" he cried, "the house of Rothschild has won Waterloo:" his house had lent the money for it. He sprang into the saddle, galloped all night, reached the shore at daybreak, bribed a fisherman to take him across the stormy sea, and by whipping and spurring reached London thirty-six hours before any one else. He used these hours in buying up all the stocks he could, and gained nearly two millions of pounds. Many on the battlefield besides him had perfect faith in the good news, but their faith was a thin lazy thing, and did not rouse them to act at once. And so a faith that does not master and move you cannot make you rich in the goods of the soul. Real Christianity is a real living faith in a real living Saviour: it is a whole faith in the whole Saviour.

This whole faith in Christ will make you *faithful to Christ*, that is, true-hearted and loyal to Him till life's last hour. Faithfulness to Christ also ensures a hearty obedience to your parents, without which your life must prove a miserable failure.

Shun strong drink, love your work, follow Christ: he who has these three secrets will, in all ordinary cases, be like David's fair and fruitful evergreen, whose deep roots suck strength from the unfailing river. He shall thrive in everything: "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

On the coast of Norway, amid numberless rocks and shoals, the captain showed me three lighthouses. At night he had so to steer as to have all these three lights in a line. Steer your little vessel by the three lights I have pointed out to you, and you cannot suffer shipwreck in time or eternity.

II. *The crown of success in life.*

The end crowns a human history. A green, peaceful, beautiful old age is a part of the prosperity celebrated in the first Psalm. The tree is to be ever-green to the very end. The fear of life, especially of old age, is common; and it is found among some thoughtful children. De Quincey tells us that the vision of life fell too early and too powerfully upon him, and that the horror of life mixed itself already in earliest youth with the heavenly sweetness of life. Others have written of "the pain of growing old." It has greatly interested me to notice how the Bible fills us with hope about a Christian old age. I have been setting side by side the views of life in the Psalms and in some modern poems. Schoolboys often recite Longfellow's poem, *Excelsior*. It is a piece of beautiful nonsense. My heart refuses to grow warm as the strange youth, with his strange banner, climbs into the snow, and the darkness, and the lonely death. One wonders what took the aimless boy up there. Tom Hood calls his forty years forty thieves, because they had stolen his youth from him. He sings:—

"I remember, I remember,
The fir-trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm further off from heaven
Than when I was a boy."

And again—

"Youth it is sunny,
Age has no honey—
What can an old man do but die?
Spring it is cheery,
Winter is dreary,
Green leaves hang, but the brown must fly;
When he's forsaken,
Withered and shaken
What can an old man do but die?"

But David's evergreen has no brown leaves to be
swept away by the wintry blast.

Coleridge says—

"Life went a-maying
With Nature, Hope, and Poesy
When I was young!
When I was young? Ah, woeful when!"

In words that might fill the reader's eyes with tears, Robert Burns pictures old age in his lament, "Man was made to mourn." Don't believe a word of it: life is not so poor a thing as that except to godless men. Man makes himself mourn, and God bids you be blest. He "giveth us all things richly to enjoy," as if joy were the whole aim of God, and the whole

duty of man. He will make us happy hereafter, if we will only suffer Him to make us happy here. He entreats us to be happy as if He alone were to receive the favour. Here is David's estimate of old age: "The righteous shall flourish (literally, 'break forth') like the palm-tree."

"And in old age, when others fade,
They fruit still forth shall bring;
They shall be fat, and full of sap,
And aye be flourishing."—Ps. xcii. 14.

"Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me:
And in God's house for evermore
My dwelling-place shall be."—Ps. xxiii. 6

To many Christians old age has been the happiest period of life. Many who had naturally a dash of melancholy in them, have by piety lived it all off, and come out into God's full unclouded sunshine; willing to depart, and thankful that they have had enough of this life. The joys of youth need not be all the joys of your life, or the best; for the Christians should feel with Browning that

"The best of life is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made."

And, like him, "they greet the unseen with a cheer." Some have felt their old age more by the strength of the soul than by the weakness of the body; for they renewed their youth like the eagle's, and the best flowers of life blossomed out afresh near the end.

They grew older without ageing in heart. It is not so with the powers of the mind and body; for in respect of these Ruskin tells us that we are like the foxglove, which, as soon as it is ripe, begins to decay atop. One wonders what in the world some people will do when they grow old. Fancy them sitting by the fireside when they are seventy: they hate reading; they care not for quiet home joys; they have to go abroad for all their favourite entertainments and excitements; they have travelled so far inland that they no longer hear the murmur of the heavenly sea. It saddens one to visit them: to comfort them is an almost hopeless task: their year is all winter, and their leaf has withered: to them life has become a field of nettles, where they are stung at every step. As you compare the evergreen and the withered old age, the question for you is, this or that—which? Why not the evergreen? Why should you be unblest, who might be blessed? Let the Bible breathe into you its own hopefulness regarding the godly life, and what follows it. We may hope that when old age comes, God Himself

“May lay His hand
Upon your heart gently, not smiting it,
But as a harper lays his open palm
Upon his harp, to deaden its vibrations.”

The wisest way, I daresay, is not to think about old age at all, but to live now with all your heart the life of Christ. That keeps you from all those vile things that age the soul and heart, and make old men cross

and joyless. I was reading that when our men-of-war were built of oak, they took the oak not from the forests, but from the fields. The field-grown trees had drunk in more of heaven's sunshine, and thus had a stronger heart, and lasted longer. That you may grow within and all around like David's evergreen, let nothing come between you and the sunshine of God's grace: let nothing come between the roots of your being and the river of life. Put away from you all that frets and sours the soul: be sweet-tempered, unselfish, generous: in a word, be Christ-like; and then you'll be ready for middle age and old age, should God bring you to it. In any case, you shall have lived long enough, and David's incense-breathing evergreen will be your biography; for you shall not outlive true success and happiness. Why should not joy be the companion of your whole life journey? And the evergreen will be the emblem of your life beyond the grave. "For this God is our God: He will be our guide, even unto death" (Ps. xlviii. 14). These words mean, He guides us over death, or He guides us to immortality, or He guides us to youthfulness. In any case, the meaning is, that the evergreen shall be green for ever in the Paradise above.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HART.

"As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."
—Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

THE hart is the old English name for the male of the red deer or the stag, while the hind is the name for the female. The female is probably meant here; for, though the noun is masculine, the verb is feminine. All nations have found their symbols of the soul in the female rather than in the male, and we feel that the choice is just. For instance, in the famed picture, "Lux in Tenebris," the soul is represented as a young, shrinking girl. There are many kinds of deer in the East, and many names for them: the antelope, the ibex, the gazelle, the roe. As all the Bible-writers like to wed their lessons to the commonest objects, David probably has in his eye the common gazelle of Syria. It was a great pleasure to our party to surprise a small herd of gazelles. The gazelle is one of the loveliest, cleanest, gentlest, and most sprightly of animals. It constantly "snuffs up the wind," and travels against the wind; and its scent is so very keen that it rarely fails to detect a lurking foe. Its swiftness is pro-

verbial, and it is famed for its feats of leaping. It can outstrip the fleetest horse or greyhound in the chase. It was often used as an emblem of womanly beauty, and its name was a favourite name for women. Mr. Kinglake, in his *Eothen*, calls it "a darling," "a beauty." Dorcas and Tabitha both mean gazelle. Like robin redbreast among birds, the gazelle, more than any other animal, awakens in man an interest of peculiar tenderness—all the more that it is easily tamed, and still is often kept as a pet. Thus the Eastern has a sort of half-human feeling towards this little creature, and a dim sense of respect and comradeship. You can thus understand why it is a great pet with the poets. Byron, Moore, and Wordsworth all praise the surpassing beauty of "the dear gazelle." Solomon does the same when he says, "My beloved is like a roe or a young hart." In his *White Doe of Rylstone*, Wordsworth regards it, or the order to which it belongs, as in some mysterious sense nearer man than other animals are. He describes—

"A doe most beautiful, clear white,
A radiant creature, silver bright."

And of the dead lady Aäliza, he says—

"To the grief of her soul that doth come and go,
In the beautiful form of this innocent doe."

The timidity of the gazelle also adds a fine touch to the fitness of this symbol. When the Emperor Hadrian was about to die, he touchingly addressed his soul as

a little, shrinking, trembling creature, the guest and companion of his body. These are some of the interesting reasons why this one animal suggested the soul to the poet David. His good taste would not allow him to find his image among big beasts and gross feeders like swine and bullocks. He chose the gazelle because it had so much spirit in it.

This beautiful image of the soul took the fancy of the early Christians, for it is often found on the walls of their catacombs, and is usually represented drinking at a stream.

David's hart is a great drinker, and most impatient of thirst. When summer's drought has dried up the streams, the life of the hart becomes one desire. It would then almost go through fire to get water. The Arabs lie in wait for the thirsty gazelles at their watering-places, and shoot them. And it searches for water till it finds it, or dies on the way. Its scent for water is keener than its sight, and keener even than its scent for its lurking foes. There are wells among the ridges of the desert known only to the gazelles, and for which the Arabs search in vain. When thirsty, the hart pants, or, as the word means, brays after the waterbrooks. It then makes a strange, piercing sound: its whole heart and flesh cry out for water. In that braying heart, David traces the semblance of his own soul longing for the living God. He also has the greatest wants and the keenest desires: he too must go out of himself for that of which he has no stock or store within. To a child of the desert,

how beautiful the image, how affecting the sense in these words, "As the hart brayeth after the water-brooks, so brayeth my soul after Thee, O God."

It is summer in Palestine. All the streams among the hills are dried up, and each channel is now a wady or dry river-bed, which makes a great impression upon the imagination of the traveller. It is a perfect picture of desolation; and under the stinging heat, the bleached stones have a sickening effect. It is as if the Angel of Death had spread his wings over the scene. Their accustomed watering-places only mock and increase the thirst of the gazelles, and the panting, braying creatures roam in search of water. And such is the lot of those who hope to slake the thirst of their souls only at earth's streams.

It is hard for us to learn this vast truth of the Bible, and of human life. Many of us start life with the hope of finding satisfaction without giving ourselves to God and Christ Jesus; and some, after the bitterest failures, still cling to this vain hope. The earthly good from which one expected earthly joy has mocked him, but he says, "Oh, I had too little of it; I did not give it a fair chance; if I could add this earthly pleasure and that, then I should have the satisfaction I desire." Thus millions in vain vex and torture nature for pleasure. But no art can make blessedness spring out of the cold earth, no chemistry can extract it out of clay.

Let the trees be our teachers. For some weeks I have been watching the lime-trees near me. In early

spring the tender buds were wrapped up in shining purple sheaths, each of which was a silk and waterproof mantle protecting the little nursling against wind, and rain, and cold. But soon the growing leaf laid off its sheath as you have laid off your winter overcoat; and then thousands of these purple sheaths were trampled in the dust. I transferred my admiration from the shining sheaths to the beautiful fragrant blossoms, but I found that the cradle of the flower was so contrived as to become also its coffin. The exquisite leaves were still left for me to admire, but now they are rain-bashed, wind-blown, and besooted; and, worse than all, envious little insects have riddled them with holes. The ragged tree now wakes my pity more than my admiration, and soon winter's surly blast shall leave me nothing but the bare, staring branches. All its perfume gone, the stag-headed thing for many a month will seem to me little more than a bundle of withered sticks.

I was lately examining some papers carefully preserved in a locked drawer. The vile insinuating dust had marred the beauty of my precious things, and my joy in possessing them. It is not an idle fancy that fetches illustrations of my subject from these lime-trees and these dusty documents. There is some flaw or crack in everything under heaven, some God-given hint that we must seek better things than our eyes have ever seen. God has dashed every earthly joy with some pain, that we may seek those joys that know no sorrow.

This sermon is not for those who seek pleasure in sin. Be sure, however, that sin will poison all the wells of life, and soon make the sweetest water as bitter as Marah. I do not mean that you are to be a mere joy-monger, with whom the first question always is, "How can I make myself happy?" I want you to understand your strange heart, and to be at peace with God and yourself.

Most pleasure-seekers are like sportsmen: the pleasure is in the chase, and at an end as soon as the game is bagged. You know well that when a boy's collection of shells, of butterflies, of postage stamps, or of anything is completed, the pleasure of the collection is at an end, and often his fine collection is like the waterbrooks that fail in summer.

The strange thing is, that the rich are often the most unhappy, and that the poor are the most contented. "You might as well try to fill a chest with wisdom," one says, "as a soul with wealth." They are the darlings of nature and fortune who are now asking "Is life worth living?" and who give the horrid answer, No. One of the most successful men of his day said, "Success is full of promise till men get it, and then it is a last year's nest from which the bird has flown."

The worst of all is that earth's pleasures, like the waterbrooks in summer, don't last. After the great earthquake the other year in the Riviera, a dead boy's hand was seen above the ruins, and upon it was perched the bird he used to feed. Every human heart some

day becomes like that bird; for the human hand that befriended it, once living and bounteous, is found dead, and cold, and empty. If you believe this one truth, then there will not be stuff enough left in you for the making of a child of earth: you shall be spoiled for that for ever.

I shall now give you two illustrations from biography. De Quincey writes the life of his friend, Lady Carbery. She was counted one of the most fortunate girls in Britain. A merchant's daughter, she became a Countess at the age of twenty-six. She seemed to have everything heart could wish. For instance, thirty-five horses stood at her service in her husband's stables. "In no case," says her biographer, "was it more literally realised, as daily almost I witnessed, that

"All Paradise
Could, by the simple opening of a door,
Let itself in upon her."

Yet she fell early into a sort of disgust with her own advantages, because they had promised much and performed next to nothing in satisfying the yearnings of her heart. At the age of twenty-seven she had come to a most bitter sense of the hollowness and *treachery* of the portion earth was offering to her, and she sought refuge in an earnest Christian life. I was reading the story of the life of Jenny Lind, the greatest singer of this century. She gained a large fortune and world-wide fame. Yet even these two prized waterbrooks

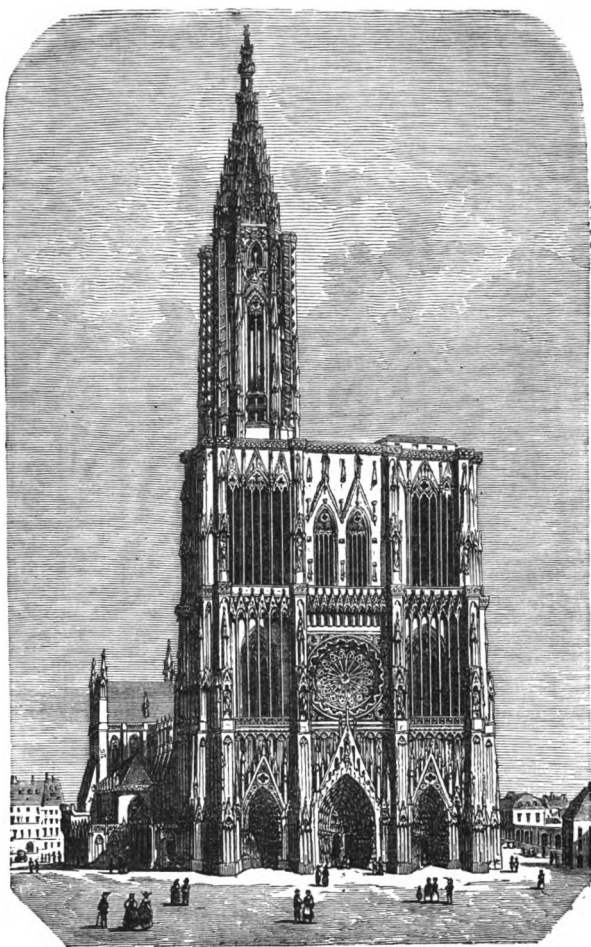
supplied not water to quench the thirst of her soul.
Her favourite lines were—

“In vain I seek for rest
In all created good ;
It leaves me still unblest,
And makes me sigh for God.
And, sure, at rest I cannot be,
Until my soul finds rest in Thee.”

The soul's unslaked thirst amid earth's best water-brooks is, or will become, one of the biggest facts in your life, and you should try to find out exactly what it means. Be sure that that thirst is one of the noblest things in you. It reveals the excellency of your soul, and tells that you are not a low-born earthling, but that you are made for great things. Though fallen, you are not fallen so low as that you can find lasting satisfaction in earth's mean and perishing goods. Your soul is of heavenly origin, and so earth is not enough for its happiness. Your deepest yearnings bid you look not down but up. Your soul was made for God, and until it rests in Him it must be restless. Say to yourself—

“Shall this life of mine be wasted ?
Shall this vineyard lie untilled ?
Shall true joy pass by untasted ?
And this soul remain unfilled ?”

The soul of man has a great thirst. God can satisfy that thirst, and none else can. These are the three great truths in our theme. You may ask, How does God satisfy the soul's thirst? Let one case stand for



STRASSBURG CATHEDRAL.

all. When David wrote this psalm he was a lonely exile, under the sorest trials, and his heart was thirsting for sympathy and strength. God's loving-kindness (v. 8) was then to him what fresh spring-water is to the fainting desert-traveller. His creed is, "All my fresh springs are in Thee." His faith and hope in God (vers. 5, 11), give him peace and courage amid his cruel trials.

Tauler, a famous preacher at Strassburg, was tortured with an inner unrest and thirst. One day he was sadly walking along the Rhine, and praying to God for light. He met an aged blind beggar. "God give thee a good day," Tauler said. "I thank thee; but *all* my days are good, and none ill," was the reply. "God give thee happy life," the preacher spake again. "I never am unhappy," the old man replied. Tauler asked the beggar to tell him the secret of his happy life, and he was told that it was a childlike trust in God. Tauler then got the light for which he had been praying. Returning to the city at noon, he saw far down the street a mighty shadow made by the tower of the cathedral.

"Behold !' he said,
'The stranger's faith made plain before mine eyes,
As yonder tower outstretches to the earth
The dark triangle of its shade alone
When the clear day is shining on its top,
So, darkness in the pathway of man's life
Is but the shadow of God's providence,
By the great sun of wisdom cast thereon ;
And what is dark below is light in heaven.'"

This great lesson was well understood by that dumb schoolboy, who, when thoughtlessly asked by a visitor why God had made him dumb, took the chalk and wrote on the blackboard, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

But how am I to reach the waterbrooks? you may ask. This psalm shows that David found them in the house, the word, the love of God—in God Himself. One writer tells us that our text should run, "As the hind panteth over the aqueducts, so panteth my soul." There are covered aqueducts in many parts of Palestine, like those which bring the water from Solomon's pools to Jerusalem. Standing upon them you hear the music of the flowing stream which you cannot taste. This writer supposes that the hart is thus panting for water very near, but not within its reach. That is not the meaning. The uncovered stream is near, and the word is, "Ho! every one that thirsteth—water, water!" The stone is rolled away from the well's mouth, so that the sheep and lambs can be abundantly watered. He who searches the Scriptures is like the well-digger in the East. Piercing the surface, he soon taps God's great store-houses. Then the living stream rises responsive to his search, and meets him more than half-way.

David's longing for God is very keen. Travellers tell us that one of the most touching sights in the world is to see a herd of gazelles quenching their thirst at a river in a time of drought. The very scent of the water gives them new life; they dash into the water;

they drink and drink again, and deeper drink ; they cling to the dear stream, while every part of their body shivers with joy. Even as the flowing stream gives deep delight to the panting gazelle, so God's grace solaces every soul that keenly feels its great needs. Blessed is he that thirsteth for God, for he shall be satisfied.

CHAPTER VIII.

EBENEZER.

MORE than one hundred years ago, a mason was repairing a steeple in Paisley. He missed his footing, but saved himself from falling by clutching a stone, which he held till mattresses were brought, into which he dropped. That mason afterwards became a rich Glasgow merchant, and purchased an estate on which a part of our city now stands, in which one of the streets is called by his name. When the steeple in Paisley was demolished, he secured the big stone by which his life had been saved, and had it set up in a niche in his garden. He often showed it to his friends, and recited the story of his wonderful deliverance. I heard a friend of his family tell the story, when laying the foundation stone of a new church near the spot where the stone from the steeple used to stand. He very happily took that stone for his text, and urged the founders of the new church to set up their Ebenezer as his friend had done near that very spot.

That stone in the garden was a real Ebenezer; that is, as you read in the margin, "The stone of help." It was both the memorial and the means of help to the mason in his sore need.

In the days of Samuel, God gave the children of Israel a great victory over the Philistines. Samuel wished the victory to be well remembered, that it might fill the people with hope; and he also wished to express his gratitude to God in some telling and abiding way. As men set up ever so many monuments to celebrate their own doings, he resolved to have one to celebrate Jehovah's; and so we read in 1 Sam. vii. 12, "Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." That big stone on the crag was a great sermon to every Israelite every time he saw it. It made it easy for him to localise and realise the lessons of Samuel.

We are well employed when, on the first Sabbath of the New Year, we meet in our welcoming sanctuary, remember the victories God has given us in the battle of life, and set up our Ebenezer amid prayers and praises. Oh, may God's good Spirit help us to-day in this sacred work.

An Ebenezer is a monument standing between the past and the future, and doing justice to the present. It thus appeals to us through the eye to look

- I. Backward.
- II. Upward.
- III. Forward.

I. *The backward look.*

To Samuel's backward view there arose millions of

mercies, amid which all his trials were forgotten, or remembered only to give a keener edge to his sense of God's help. He was like one surveying a breast-deep harvest-field, where the yellow grain buries the weeds out of sight, and is growing them all down. It is most comely that we should to-day thank God for all sorts of mercies.

How different is our God from the gods of the heathen. In ancient Greece and Rome it was believed that the gods had many a grudge against the human race; and the heathens to-day have no friendly deities, but millions of spiteful ones. Devil-devil is the name the Maoris give to God.

We thank our God for His mercies to all mankind, and for mercies public and national. During the past year we have had no wars in our land, nor earthquakes, nor pestilences, nor famines, nor floods. I fear that these stupendous favours are to us like the air, which we never notice, though without it we could not live. You should also most heartily thank God for endless mercies to yourself: mercies in your school, in your home, your health of mind and body, your food, your clothing, your friends, &c., &c. By the way, you should remember that all God's daily gifts to you are "mercies." They were "bounties" to Adam before he fell, but "mercies" after his fall. By revolting against God he lost all right to them, so that the old-fashioned way of speaking about *mercies* is the correct one. Thank God also for all the blessings winter brings, and for the

pleasures of this kindly season. One mercy covers another and surpasses it, as wave rides wave in the incoming tide. What liberality, what generosity in God's everyday bounties! Many of your hopes and trials were mercies in the making, for they have brought you better things than they snatched from you. God has often sent you to earthly sorrows for heavenly pleasures. You are a living monument of mercy: your life is as full of wonders as Samuel's was. You also are a temple-child. From your earliest years you, Samuel-like, have heard God's voice calling you distinctly by name; and God has brought you as one of His favoured children to this good hour.

The best part of the past year has been the *A.D.* in it. To you it has been an *Annus Domini*, a "year of grace," a year of the Lord, in which the Lord has helped you. Ebenezer is a favourite word with some people, who keep up the old Puritan custom of giving expressive Bible names. They give it as a name to their children, and their churches, and to themselves, I notice, when they send anonymous contributions. Ask God to give you to-day the spirit of the name; let your heart be as full of Ebenezers as your life has been of mercies. When the children of Israel were on the edge of the Promised Land, and no longer needed the manna, they were told to fill an omer with it, and lay it up as a memorial in the ark, to be kept for their generations. I am sure that your memory has no ark big enough to hold the half of the smallest samples of God's mercies to the youngest child here.

Set up at least your stone of remembrance, and try to recite to your soul the story of the past year. God's best gifts have been coming to you like the snowflakes in a snowy day, like the manna during the still night. Then

“Fill we an omer with memories precious,
Long to be kept at the shrine of our praise ;
Waters of Marah made sweet to refresh us,
Palm shades of Elim and Passover days.”

We are now to study

II. *The upward look.*

As Samuel turns heart and face to the Lord, he turns his back upon all other hopes and helpers. Blessed are they who imitate him.

Some forty years ago, Henri Heine, the famous poet, was one of the greatest blasphemers and atheists in the world. He had written much of what he afterwards confessed to be “poisoned poetry.” He was as proud, he tells us, as Nebuchadnezzar before his fall, and a self-worshipper. When in Paris, he became half lame and half blind. The dark shadow without created darker shadows within him. He at once discovered that infidelity was a holiday-religion, and that it would not do for a sick-bed. He then became what he calls “a poor ex-god,” and was content to kneel alongside of Uncle Tom. Till then he used to worship only among the statues of the heathen gods and goddesses in the Louvre Gallery. He most admired

"the goddess of beauty, our dear Lady of Milo," as he called her: the statue of a smiling woman, whose arms had been lost. With his death-sickness upon him, he painfully made his way to his favourite place in front of the Venus of Milo. "At her feet," he says, "I lay a long time, and I wept so passionately, that a stone must have had compassion on me. Therefore the goddess looked down compassionately upon me, yet at the same time inconsolably, as though she would say, 'See you not that I have no arms, and that therefore I can give you *no help?*'" It matters little in the end what idol a man may choose. It may be honourable wealth, fame, learning, and even earthly duty; but if he lives without God and without Christ, in his hour of need he will find that the goddess of his idolatry has no arms, and can give him no help. But "hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

As to-day you turn from all idols, like Samuel, also give yourself afresh to Jehovah. In your games the first thing you do is to "take sides." You at once go over boldly to the side you have taken, and put forth all your might, that your side may win. Just do the same with the religion of Christ, and you'll be a first-rate Christian. Be not like the peevish children whom Christ watched in the market-place, and who would play neither at funerals nor at weddings. Be among wisdom's children, who at once choose the best side, and give their whole heart to it.

One young man to whom I was speaking about the Christian life at the end of the year, said to me, "I mean to think about that; but let me alone till the New Year's over. I'm not going to do anything that's specially bad; but a man must keep his engagements, and I could not get through mine well if I were to become a Christian. When the season's over, I'll come and have a talk with you about the matter." Strange to say, he kept his word. I quoted that young man's words in an address, and they went to the heart of one of the hearers. She felt that she was detected, grew ashamed of herself, and surrendered to the Saviour. There is some secret, gentle, mighty influence about the New Year, that makes it one of the best seasons for yielding to Christ, and for renewing our vows. In ancient Rome the soldiers renewed their oath of loyalty to Cæsar on each New Year day. That is an excellent custom for all the soldiers of Jesus Christ. Our feelings ebb and flow like the sea, and often at the New Year they reach high tide. God make us wise to seize this precious opportunity. The poet Southey gives us the Mahometan legend of a great hour, revolving once in every year, during which the gates of Paradise are thrown open to their utmost extent, and gales of happiness issue forth upon the total family of man. We believe in a whole year of grace, yet every year has great hours of opportunity, and these hours cluster around this season. Pray that you may not miss the good they bring to your heart's door.

The nations of antiquity used to begin their New Year at different dates. I like the style of the ancient Egyptians, who made September 15th their New Year's day, because on it the Nile reached its highest level. The river of our life should reach its highest level on this blessed day.

Ebenezer, that invites us to look backwards and upwards, also invites us to look—

III. *Forwards.*

The month of January gets its name from Janus, the old Roman god of doors. He had two faces—the one looking backwards, and the other forwards. As January is the door by which we enter on the New Year, and as it bids us look behind and before, it was a pleasing conceit to give it the name of Janus. One side of Samuel's Ebenezer, like Janus, was turned to the future, for it was intended to be an inspiration for the days to come. The "hitherto" has wrapped up in it the "henceforth:" the past yields encouragement for the future. God, who has been our help in the past, is also our hope for the years to come; our shelter from every blast, and our eternal home. He knows well that many a sore struggle lies before him, for his foes in the land are a swarming host—Philistines, Midianites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, &c. You too will have to fight your way through opposing forces. It is very difficult to be always good, and doing good.

One of the most popular nursery stories in the world

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is Jack the Giant-killer. The reason, I think, why millions have read it with delight is, that it shows how youth and weakness, guided by a pure brave heart, can conquer the gross strength of the most bulky foe. In its own way, it teaches the same lesson as the story of David and Goliath, or as the story of the children of Israel under Samuel. No almanac can tell what this year may bring forth, even in the weather. The veil hiding the future from our eyes is woven by mercy's hand. In some dangerous passes, Alpine guides bandage the eyes of the traveller, lest the sight of the dreadful abyss should make him dizzy, and so he passes along in safety. Thus the secrets of the future are hid from us, that we may give our whole mind to the plain duties of the present. But we may have a feeling of perfect sureness about two things: "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us," and He'll not desert His people half way. He is before as well as behind us; and this year, if we obey Him, will be to us "a year of grace." To us, as to Samuel, the future will reveal foes who will kill us if we don't kill them. "Perplexing paths" may await us, but we shall expect to find the finger-posts when we come to the cross-roads, and the notches on the trees that will point our way through the forest.

The dangers of the future should not affright our souls, nor should its work discourage us. Poor bungling work will it be at the best, but the Lord helps every one who has the heart to serve Him. A famous painter at his death left many pictures

which were mostly sketches, yet with little bits finished with wonderful beauty. The best Christian lives are like that painter's sketches. All earnest workers feel like the famous Athenian painter. He painted so well that he cheated the birds, for when his picture of a man carrying grapes was exhibited in the open air, they dashed at the grapes. When his friends praised him, he sadly replied, "Ah, if I had painted the man to the life, the birds would not have dared to come near him: I have miserably failed." I was told lately that Hubert Herkomer, the artist, was a wood-carver in his youth, and that his father, also a wood-carver, lives with him. The father, afraid of injuring his failing eyesight, will not work in gas light. At night the son secretly takes up and improves his father's work. In the morning, on examining his work at the window, the father says, "Ah, my eyesight is better than I feared: I never did better work than that." If you are a true worker, the longer you live, the more keenly will you feel the defects of your work; but an unseen Hand will help you, the Lord will perfect that which concerneth you, and you will at last receive the "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Let this New Year find you face to face with your Ebenezer. If you have some fears to-day, grasp more firmly the outstretched helping hand of the Man Christ Jesus. I heard a friend telling that one day he was walking down Union Street behind a poorly dressed mother and child. The child was holding the

mother's skirts. When they came to the turmoil and crowd at the crossing of Argyll Street, the child at once let go the skirt, and seized her mother's hand, and passed safely over. His poet's eye found a sermon there. When you have no fear, you may think it enough to hold by the skirt of Christ's garment; but when dangers press, you must firmly grasp the hand of the living Guide.

Looking backwards, upwards, and forwards, we now set up our stone of help as a memorial of mercy, a witness of our dedication to God, and a token of our trust and hope. May there go forth from it a sacred light that shall brighten for us the whole path of life. God give you a happy New Year.

CHAPTER IX.

CHRIST'S CRADLE.

MATT. i. 18-25; LUKE ii. 1-8.

LET us reverently gather around the infant Christ. In His wonderful life, the first chapter seems the most wonderful, and its lessons should sink into our hearts.

Perhaps you have a great desire to visit our Saviour's birthplace. The Holy Land has many evangelic scenes that help you to understand Christ, but Bethlehem is not one of them. It is very hard to believe the legends that cluster round this spot. You are there shown the altar of the Holy Innocents, and you are asked to believe that the remains of twenty thousand infants slain by Herod lie buried close by the place of the Nativity. They also show you the preserved tongue of one of them. Nobody knows for certain the exact spot where Christ was born. A big church stands over what is called the Cave of the Nativity. In the vault beneath it you find sixteen ever-burning lamps, and a silver star in the white marble pavement, encircled with the words (in Latin), "Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary." It was most painful to see the rival priests of the Greek and

Romish Churches worshipping there. A Turkish soldier, with bayonet fixed, and scorn on his face, stood between them to keep order; and the two companies of priests seemed to be trying to drown each other's voices. In the chapel I noticed that the pictures on the walls had many holes in them. I asked an explanation from our guide, who was a native of Bethlehem. He told me that the Greek and Latin priests had quarrelled some three years before our visit, which was in 1884; that they had locked the doors of the church, that they might not be hindered from fighting their battle out; that some of them had been slain and wounded; and that the holes in the pictures had been made by the bullets from their pistols.¹ It was a similar squabble between these two sets of monks about a key that led to the Crimean War, and that brought to the grave, as Kinglake tells us, fully one million of soldiers and workmen. And yet that awful war sprang from the very spot where peace on earth and goodwill toward men were proclaimed at the birth of Christ. It makes one sad almost to sickness to visit the cave which tradition makes the birthplace of Christ. It was one of the most painful and humiliating of my experiences in the Holy Land.

A visit to a native khan or caravanserai will, however, really help you to understand this story. Every

¹ In 1891 I found that the holed pictures had been removed or repaired; but I have just read in the newspapers that the Greek and Latin priests have again been attacking each other with revolvers.

village in Palestine has its "inn" or "guest-chamber." It belongs to the sheikh or chief of the village, and is usually the upper storey of his house. More than once have I spent the night in the guest-chamber. What a crowd of scriptural memories it brings upon one! In such a chamber the body of Dorcas was laid out—in such a chamber our Saviour instituted the Lord's Supper.

Several villages have also a khan, or big covered building, without furniture or attendance. It offers the traveller walls, roof, water, and no more. It is a public lodging-house to which each brings his own food and furniture. One I examined at sunset was a paltry, ill-built house, with well-smoked walls and unpaved floor. It had a good many travellers in it. They were seated on their mats at the one end of the building, which was raised some three or four feet above the level of the floor. Their cattle were on the floor quite near them—no partition separated the two divisions. It was a noisy and dusty scene, and the pariah dogs were prowling about. There was no "crib" such as you find in our stables, though the "Crib of Bethlehem" is exhibited at Rome. So far as I know, there are no "mangers" like ours in the East. By a "manger" they mean only the place where the cattle eat their food—the raised part of the floor on which the horses rest their nose-bags. These khans were sometimes in caves, and tradition has thus placed in a cave the stable in which Christ was born. Some such khan—half stable and half

bedroom, a humble shelter for man and beast, with all its rank unpleasant breaths and rude noises—was the scene of the birth that has changed the world. That strange company of men and beasts in the khan in the plain of Esdraelon revealed to me the extreme humbleness of the birth of our Saviour.

One of my last experiences in Palestine really helped me to understand the story of Christ's cradle. We were in the highlands of Galilee, where the habits of the people are very much what they were in the days of Christ. In the village of Yaron, the Iron of Joshua, we were the guests of the sheikh, who gave us, as he said, one thousand welcomes. The guest-chamber in his house was "the inn" of the village. But there was no room in it for three of our party, and they were conducted to a humbler apartment, which, though the second-best house in the village, was half a dwelling-house and half a stable. The cattle were on the lower floor, and the family slept on the upper floor (some two feet higher), on the edge of which was "the manger," a feeding-trough made of mud, in which an infant would find the safest resting-place under that roof. One of our party declared that that one sight repaid the trouble and expense of his whole trip. It shed a fresh light upon the story of our Saviour's birth.

This cradle teaches us that—

I. *Christ is Man.*

It makes His manhood visible to all men. He is

more a man than Adam was, who was never born, and who had neither infancy nor boyhood. The second Adam thus comes far nearer us than the first Adam did. The opening pages of Matthew and Luke are so written as to give us a full feeling of sureness about Christ being a real man. It would take you a long time to count up all the touches of real humanity in these pages. You have His genealogy, His mother's name, all the arrangements for His birth, His birthplace, the cradle in the manger, even His swaddling clothes, &c. He was "born of a woman:" He was "made flesh:" He is "very man of very man." He took upon Him all of our nature, except sin. He lived not as a monk, but as a Man among men. We gain a full view of Him as a child. Every page of the gospels teaches the same truth, and we find it in every other book of the New Testament, and remarkably in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Notice also that the infant Christ was very poor. Joseph and Mary were plain working people, and a pauper's child could scarcely enter the world in a humbler way than Jesus did. In your home how carefully is the cradle prepared for the mysterious little stranger. The softest and costliest coverings are quilted, and embroidered, and curiously wrought, and scented with sweetest perfumes; and every possible attention is lavished upon the baby from the first hour of its life. But it seems that no one was attending Mary when the Child was born, and so she herself, with her own hands, wrapped Him

in swaddling clothes,¹ and laid Him in the manger. What tender condescension in Christ to come into the world in this way! Had He come into the world like Cæsar's first-born, the grandeurs attending His birth might have given us a far-off, unhomely feeling. It would then have been hard for us to have felt that He was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. But He has come down to the very lowest level of our race and lot, that He might be within the reach of our sympathies and affections.

The childhood of Christ is a perfect mine of consolation. It is the golden link between man and the most high God. It tells us that Christ has come to stay with men. It should encourage the poor, humble the proud, and rebuke vulgar display. Love to think of the infant Jesus as He really was. In Roman Catholic churches the images of the infant are laden with gold and silver and jewels. That is as much against good taste as it is against the Bible. Admire and rejoice in the divine simplicity of the Holy Child. It is most fitting that the Saviour should come to us exactly in this way, and so should make it easier for us to come to Him. Christ is all men's Christ, for He comes to take away a disease that all men have, and He brings us "the common salvation." "Christ was born in an inn," says Matthew Henry, "and He welcomes all comers."

Christ's cradle also teaches us that—

¹ The babes of Bethlehem are still wrapped in swaddling clothes, and thus look like little living mummies.

II. Jesus is more than Man.

While the chief lesson of His child-life is His manhood, the sweet story of Bethlehem will not allow us to forget His Godhood. You see at once that there is a great mystery around Him. From the very first, He is not like others. His name is "Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us" (Matt. i. 23). All we read about Him agrees with this. If you forget that Jesus is God as well as man, everything about Him staggers you; everywhere you have effects for which you can find no causes big enough; but when you remember that Jesus is God, everything falls into its right place. If He is not the true God, He must be a false man, and His words are—what shall I say?—full of madness. "Come unto Me," He says, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Who is this who calmly offers rest to all the sons and daughters of mankind! Fancy any one but God doing that! Fancy the most learned man saying, "Come unto me, all ye that want knowledge, and I will give it unto you." We should at once conclude that he was the inmate of an asylum.

If Christ had not been God, how could He ever have put in place of the passover, which He, as a Jew, so highly honoured, a new rite in honour of Himself? Christ's words and deeds and claims and honours all equally prove Him to be very God of very God, as well as very man of very man. And Christ always claimed to be more than man, and was

condemned to death, because He made Himself equal with God. "I am the root and offspring of David," He says. He was before David as the root is before the branch, and He was after David as the offspring is after the parent: He was father and son to the same person. How grandly John begins his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "He came into the world to save sinners." Oh, then, He was before He came into the world: His birth was not His beginning: He is the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, who, for our sakes, quitted all His glories, and emptied Himself. He is the true light, and can have no substitute. The signs of His Godhead are hung up on the door of the gospels, and they cover nearly the whole door.

All excellences thus meet in Christ, and He has everything that is needed to make Him our Saviour. We worship Him even as we worship the Father and the Holy Ghost. A lady, whose life has been written, used to speak of Jesus as "my Jesus," "my dear Jesus." An aged minister one day said to her, "You give a nobleman his titles, why not give Jesus His." From that day she ceased to speak of Jesus so familiarly.

Christ, then, is man to pity, and God to save. He saves with the pity of man, and the power of God.

At the cradle we should also learn that—

· III. *Jesus is the Messiah.*

The child of poverty, He was also the child of

prophecy. The heart of the Old Testament is a glorious Person, the Coming One, who should bring salvation to perishing men. He is called the *Messias*, that is, the *Anointed One*. All the glowing prophecies of the Old Testament point forward to Him, and the hope of His coming was the chief passion of the devout Jew. The whole Old Testament slopes Christ-wards, as our rivers run seawards.

Matthew proves to us again and again that Jesus is the *Messias-child*. His plan is to lay the sweet story of the birth of Christ alongside of the well-known prophecies, and to show how perfectly the two agree. "It is written"—that is the keynote of his gospel. This is how he crowns the story of the cradle: "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying," &c. (Matt. i. 22).

Jesus Himself always claimed to be the *Messias*. "I know that *Messias* cometh," said the woman at the well (John iv. 25). "Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He." Paul and Peter were always proving to the Jews out of their own Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth was the *Messias* promised to their fathers. The first Christian creed was that Jesus is the Christ—Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messias*. I have often heard the children in a Jewish mission-school examined upon the early years of Christ's earthly life. How well they proved that nearly every part of Christ's life fitted into the Old Testament prophecies, as a key fits its

lock. They could easily give you plain proofs from the time and place of His birth, His house or family, His lowliness, His miracles, His sufferings and death, His resurrection, His rejection by the most of the Jews, and His success among the Gentiles. I fear that few Gentile children understand this truth as well as these Jewish children did. One wonders why more Jews do not receive Christ. The reason is, that very few of them study either the Old Testament prophecies or the New Testament, else they might discover that the life of the Messiah is written twice over in them. We should have more hope of them if they would only read earnestly the Old Testament.

The famous Dr. Cappadose of Amsterdam, a Jew by birth, thus describes his conversion: "I was reading my Hebrew Old Testament, and I came to Isaiah liii. I had read it before, but this time my eyes seemed opened. I began to think it was the *New Testament* I had got hold of by mistake. I turned the back of it to me, to make sure it was my own Bible. As I read, again and again I saw what I had never seen before—sin laid on another; and who could it be but the Lord Jesus? The end of it was, that I became a Christian without the New Testament at all."

When you remember that all the desires of a pious Jew centred in the Messiah, you can easily understand such an outburst of praise as came from the lips of Elizabeth and Mary, of Zecharias, and Simeon and Anna. Zecharias likened the coming of Christ

to the dayspring from on high, bringing to light those in darkness, and in the shadow of death. A belated caravan in the desert is overtaken by the thick gloom. The night is very cold, the dew is heavy, the roads are painful and dangerous. Men and camels lose heart, and spend the night in misery and fear, waiting for the dayspring. At last the sun quietly rises upon their sullen path; the travellers are as men alive from the dead; and their feet are lifted up on their homeward way. And thus, from Christ's cradle, a new light arose upon benighted men. He is as the Morning Sun rising over the old dead world, or like Heaven's sweet life in spring, which creates a new life on earth. Like the sun, untainted and undefiled by earth, He is a fresh unspent force that can make all things new. An old writer says that the voice of the prophets, when they speak of Christ, is too loud for that little land of Palestine, and plainly meant to fill a universe.

The story of the cradle also teaches you that—

IV. *Christ should be your own Messiah and Saviour.*

For, while Jesus was born and educated as a Jew, He has not one Jewish prejudice. He is not the child of His age, but the child of eternity. He is the Son, not of Abraham only, but of Adam—the Son of Man, and the Messiah for all men, for all Gentiles, young and old.

The cradle will do little for you unless, like the

wise men from the East, you find in it the living Christ, and worship Him. That object is the mere shell of which the object-lesson is the sweet kernel. Little comfort does the mother get in her cradle, with its little blankets and baby's clothes, when death has snatched away her darling from her bosom. The mere form or head-knowledge of religion is just what that empty cradle is to the bereaved mother. God grant that in the cradle your mind and heart may embrace the living child. The infant Saviour appeals to children. His poor cradle should teach you not to think of Him as far off and terrifying. Bible-lessons can do you little good, unless they lead you to choose Christ as your own and only Saviour. One of the great preachers of the Middle Ages was Bernardine of Sienna. Thousands were moved by his preaching to forsake their sins. After he had left their city, the Florentines resolved to erect a monument in memory of the revival among them. On the square of Sancta Croce they erected a great cross, on which was inscribed the one word Jesus. The makers of that monument understood the spirit of the New Testament. All the gospel stories are meant to fix our thoughts upon Jesus only, and to dispose each of us to say of Him, "My Lord, and my God."

Yet how often and how sadly has the story of Christ's birth been repeated in a mystic way. He should have the chief place in the guest-chamber of the soul, but as at Bethlehem, for Him and His there

is "no room in the inn." The only accommodation granted carelessly to Him is in the suburbs of the soul, in "the out-houses" of the head, the memory, or outward observances. Again, Christ is in "the stable," while self and the world are entertained royally, in "the inn." But Jesus shall not be treated by you as an outcast or a pauper. You will own Him as the King of Glory, the Heavenly Guest who shall receive all the hospitality your heart can offer. Surely you will reverently welcome Him as Man and God, as the Messiah, and as your own Messiah and Saviour. God make this spirit yours for all the days to come. Amen.

CHAPTER X.

THE BIRDS OF THE BIBLE.

"Behold the fowls of the air."—**MATT. vi. 26.**

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?"—**MATT. x. 29.**

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?"—**LUKE xii. 6.**

"Consider the ravens."—**LUKE xii. 24.**

"He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry."—**Ps. cxlvii. 9.**

I SHALL approach my subject, not like the dove circling near and nearer around the dove-cot, but like the eagle going straight to its nest.

I am to speak to you about our little feathered teachers, and the great lessons they teach.

I. *Our little teachers.*

Birds abound in Palestine. Dr. Merrill says there are at least 350 different species, though very few of them are song-birds: a fact accounted for by the great heat of the country and the absence of forests. The birds Christ mentions are still among the most common in the land. In no other place have I ever seen so many ravens as at Jerusalem.¹ Everywhere there your ear is dinned with their hoarse,

¹ The word "raven" in the Bible, it is believed, includes not only the jet black birds, but also the cinereal crows—very common in Palestine—which are mostly black, but partly of a dirty white.

hollow cry. The Bible more than once (Job xxxviii. 41, and Ps. cxlvii. 9) notices the fact that their young are very noisy in the nest; and the ravens that roost in the Mosque of Omar, and in the trees on Mount Olivet, are as deafening as their ancestors could have been to the ear of Job or David. Some one has said that these croaking ravens mourn the departed glories of the Holy City.¹ Since Noah's day, the raven has been counted an unclean bird, and of evil omen. Its presence is taken as a sign of death, and with reason.

"Like as the fatal raven, that in his voice
Carries the dreadful summons of our death."

For it has the keenest possible scent for putrefaction, and even for deadly disease. It knows when a sheep is dying—sits near, and croaks with satisfaction; and as soon as it dares—so our shepherds say—picks out its eyes. It did the same in Job's day (Prov. xxx. 17). It follows weak ewes and lambs, attacks them savagely, and picks out their eyes and tongues. Add to this, that it is an unsocial bird, that it lives in desolate places, where there is apparently little or no sustenance, and that it preys only upon the dead, the dying, and the weak, and you can understand why it is so much hated—

"This thing of evil,
This grim, ungainly, ghastly,
Gaunt and ominous bird of yore."

¹ In 1891 I did not find so many ravens as I did seven years before. The reason is, that the slaughter-houses of Jerusalem have been removed farther up the valley of the Kedron.

The old vikings bore upon their banners the black raven as an emblem of slaughter. Other nations prefer the eagle, a nobler bird of prey, which attacks not the dead, but the living. Unlike the eagle, the dove, or the robin redbreast, the raven has nothing interesting or noble about it. The only exception is, that in the East, the piebald ravens are useful as scavengers. God hears the cry of this unclean bird, though it cries for carrion: you would kill its young in the nest, and think that you did well.

The sparrows are extremely common in Palestine, especially at the Sea of Galilee, where Christ used them as His texts, and also among the sand-hills along the plain of Sharon. They are still caught for the market, as larks are in Italy, and sold at the smallest price fetched by any game. The boys catch them by means of snares or bird-lime. Matthew quotes them at two a farthing; Luke at five a half-penny: an odd lean one was flung into the bargain to encourage large purchases. A modern traveller (Van Lennep, vol. i. p. 292) tells us that this custom is still universal in the east. As the raven was the most repulsive, the sparrow was the most worthless of birds, for sparrow is just a *spare one*: it comes from the word "spare." Carry this fact with you into the sermon, as it adds force to Christ's appeals. The sparrows of Palestine greatly interested me. On the sea-shore to the south of Cæsarea the whole land was vocal with the chirpings of myriads of them. They were bigger, fatter, and fairer than

our sparrows. The sparrow with us has no music in his soul: his chirping is dull and monotonous, and gives out a metallic sound; but the Palestinian sparrow is finely chequered, and has a lively, cheery, various song. There are many kinds of sparrows in Palestine: my words apply to those I examined closely. I soon found the reason why such flocks of sparrows were among the sand-dunes. They were feeding upon acres of self-sown barley, such as you may sometimes see on sand-hills at the seaside in our own country. These sparrows sow not, neither do they reap, or gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. You see now how the sparrow of Palestine is much better qualified to teach you than is the sparrow at home.

The raven and sparrow are not domestic fowls like hens, or geese, or tame pigeons. Nor are they caged birds like your canary, which you feed, or sometimes forget to feed—ah! do you not? Man provides for them neither home nor food: they are fed only by the hands of God. They are not even like the sea-fowls, to whom the sea is a boundless larder. The raven and sparrow, our winged tutors, have no very visible means of support.

The heathens used to think that the wishes of the gods were made known by the birds. They had a set of priests called augurs, who professed to interpret, for man's benefit, the language of the birds. Some little fragments of this old custom still survive among us. The word "auspicious" means what the birds

have declared to be fortunate. Then you sometimes hear people saying that a little bird told them this or that. And in our streets you may see, beside a cage of birds, a dark-faced Italian, who advertises that his birds "will select the planet of fortune that will tell the history of your past and present life." If you consider or closely study the fowls of the air, as Christ wishes you, the sparrow will sing you a sweeter song than ever came from throat of nightingale, and the croaking ravens will fetch you sweeter food than they supplied to Elijah.

Let us now find out—

II. *The great lessons the birds teach us.*

Christ's words, of course, encourage a healthy, kindly interest in all God's creatures—a lesson boys sadly need when they go a bird-nesting; but the chief lessons He wishes us to learn from the birds are—

1. *To trust in God.* For God cares for the birds, and not one of them falls to the ground without His consent and knowledge. He opens His hand and feeds them, just as a boy, with a large bag of grain, opens his hand and feeds his pigeons. How easily it is done! Have you ever tried to find out how God feeds the sparrows in severe winters. They feed on chickweed and other weeds, which grow in abundance in our fields and waysides. By a thousand wonderful contrivances these weeds bear seed in winter. Their flowers have shields like your eyelids and lips, which they can open and close as if at will; and thus

they can shut out the dust, the rain, and the cold. Some of them really have teeth like your own—and exactly as many teeth as you have—which they clench as you do on blustering days. Then the seeds are anointed with oil, and wrapped in waterproof overcoats that are furred and flannelled inside, so that the tender nursing manages to thrive in spite of winter frosts. The leaves of these weeds are also sweet food for the little birds. When deep snows cover all the weeds, the birds find, high above the snows, hips and haws and berries. Most of these berries can be seen at a great distance against the white snow. They are red, as in the hawthorn, haws, and wild cherries; coral-red, as in the holly and mountain ash; dark purple, as in the privet; and some are bright yellow. These bright colours attract the birds, just as a gaily painted sign above an inn-door attracts the traveller. Then many of these berries have some strange property by which they are not injured by the keenest frost, so that they are never damaged as our salted and tinned meats sometimes are. These berries ripen at different times, so that God gives the sparrows their daily bread fresh all the winter through. Not a few of these berries are nauseous, and even poisonous, to man, who is thus not tempted to rob the little birds of their winter supplies. But the birds never make any mistakes about the berries. All these berries are often hidden under the snow, but God sends winter winds to shake the branches and withdraw the white cloth covering the table

richly spread for His little birds. It is an ill winter wind, and a rare, that blows no bird any good.

A long and severe winter is a very hard time for our sparrows and day-labourers. But there is an old proverb, "Many haws, many snaws."

God foresees the coming winter—providence means foreseeing—and measures His provision for the little birds by the length of the winter, and they are somehow brought through to summer. "God spends every year in feeding sparrows more than the revenues of the King of France," so says Martin Luther. In the country, in winter, I have noticed that it would not be very difficult to gather a cart-load of the weeds and seeds upon which our birds feed. Wilson, the ornithologist, tells—one can hardly believe it—that he once saw a flock of pigeons, one mile broad and over 200 miles long, and which contained, as he calculated, more than 2000 millions of birds. How many bushels would be needed for that flock for one day! And yet they tell us that you scarcely ever find a wild bird that has died of starvation. The birds fed by man do not always fare so well. Canaries have been starved in cages in wealthy homes. They, poor things, had only forgetful boys and girls for their providence.

Christ sets you an arithmetical exercise in proportion: "How much more are ye better than the fowls?" (Luke xii. 24). If God does so much for the birds, will He not do much more for you, His children, for whom Christ consented to die? Will He feed

the sparrows and forsake you? Would that be like Him? "Fear not, therefore."

Frank Buckland, the Government Inspector of Fisheries, on his death-bed, beautifully put this argument of Christ into his own words. He said, "God is good, so very good, to the little fishes, and I do not believe that He would let their inspector suffer shipwreck at last." Or, as the child's hymn puts it—

"The sparrow's Guide
Is by my side,
The raven's Helper feeds me ;
What need I fear
Of dangers near
When my dear Saviour leads me ?"

Or, as another hymn puts it—

"Beneath the spreading heavens
No creature but is fed ;
And He who feeds the ravens
Will give His children bread."

Sometimes you are as full of fears as the fluttering bird whose quick heart-throbs almost pain the hand that holds it. Christ sends you to the birds to rebuke these needless fears. He teaches that there is no "accident" even in the life of a bird—all is ordered by God, whose love and hand are everywhere. The minute and sympathetic care that watches over the falling sparrow numbers the very hairs of your head (Matt. x. 30), though the man of science tells us that your head has about 140,000 hairs, and that we lose

some every day without noticing it. Our hairs are worthless, lifeless things, which we cut without pain—the merest fringes on the outermost part of our outer life. If God takes so much care of these trifles, how much more care must He take of the immortal soul? In days of care, may your soul be like David's sparrow (Ps. lxxxiv. 3), that found a soft and cosy nest, and folded its wings in perfect peace under the shelter of the Temple. Now and again in Egypt you find a crocodile's head above the door, and sometimes a bird builds its nest inside the fearful jaws; and so, in nearly all circumstances, a Christian heart may build a peaceful nest for itself. By the tender skill of the parent birds, the thorns around the nest always guard and never wound the little nestlings. The worst ills are those that never befall us; the most chilling clouds on our path are the shadows cast by our own fears. Our over-care is nothing but distrust of God. Riches won't free us from care, though many think they would. "There be as many miseries beyond riches as on this side of them," said a great observer. We cannot cure our care by being careless, but we may cure it by learning of the sparrows.

2. They also teach us *to obey God*. All the fowls obey the law of God and of their being; they never try to live a life for which God did not intend them; they never abuse the powers God has given them. I never saw a bird drunk on a Saturday night, or at any other time: among sparrows I have not yet found a gambler, or a spendthrift, or a prodigal, or an idler,

or a suicide from over-anxiety about the future. Man defeats God's bounty as birds and beasts never do. Now we should do freely by choice what they do by instinct. By sin we put ourselves out of the common way and guard of God's providence. Man is the author of man's miseries; our calamities are not God's doing. No man really trusts in God unless he daily tries to do God's will. "Trust thou in the Lord, *and do good*: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed" (Psm. xxxvii. 3). You are to commit the keeping of your soul *in well-doing* unto God (1 Pet. iv. 19). I admired greatly, the other day, a wood-pigeon as it rose from the road, and flew to the wood. How beautifully balanced its two wings were, and with what perfect ease and grace it moved along! Thus above the clouds and mire of earth your soul should rise heavenward on equal wings of faith and obedience. You will then understand the spirit of all the great Christian heroes. They were men who put their whole trust in God, and earnestly tried to do His will, and then had no fear about the future. They went cheerfully forward, feeling quite sure that nothing could harm them so long as they kept in the path of duty.

3. The birds also teach us to *praise God*. A free and happy race, they pour forth their little souls in song, and fill the echoing air with God's praises. Song, song, song is the business of many of them. How the linnet and lark sing just because they must, as if they had been taught music by the angels, as

if they could not tell all their joy. His great heartiness is one reason why the robin redbreast is so popular. Amid the snow he sings with swelling throat and breast. Some say that the nightingale's eyes flash fire with rapture while it sings. Like the lark, the higher you rise above earthliness, the louder your praise.

"So to heaven's gates the lark's shrill song ascends
But, grovelling on the earth, the carol ends."

Luther one day, in great straits, was walking in the fields, and reading one of our texts (Matt. vi. 26). Just then a sparrow picked up a crumb, and, rising, merrily repeated its simple song. The sight broke the spell upon Luther, and made him glad. As the sparrow hopped from sprig to sprig, it seemed to him to sing—

"Mortal, cease from toil and sorrow,
God provideth for the morrow."

Addressing the sparrow, he said, "Thou art my dear doctor of divinity, for thou teachest me God's power and goodness and wisdom, and His wonderful providence."

The young should have most of this spirit of praise. All young life is happy, even among our kittens and lambs. Your brow is not furrowed with care, your heart is not wounded with wrongs, and so it is not so hard for you to have the happy cheerfulness Christ so warmly praises. Learn thoroughly in youth at the feet of Dr. Sparrow. Let him teach you that you are not your own providence, and that

you are not, like Atlas, to bear the world upon your own shoulders. Get the cure before the disease. Little faith is the great evil with us; a childlike trust in God for everything is the grand secret of a happy life, for "he that trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." In Christ's school get to the Sixth Standard, to the Sixth A. Standard; don't be content to be only in the First Standard.

"The heart that trusts for ever sings,
And feels as light as it had wings;
A well of peace within it springs,
Come good or ill:
Whate'er to-day or morrow brings,
It is His will."

Be not like children in the dark, all whose thoughts turn into fear, and who cheat and frighten themselves. Our fears create most of, and multiply all, our afflictions.

You have a child's full trust in your father. He is your providence, and, in a sense, your God. You have no care about food, or raiment, or any earthly thing, for you know that he will provide all you need. Carry up the same feeling to your Father in heaven, and it will wonderfully sweeten your whole life.

The same fountain fills the upper and nether springs of grace and nature, for God is one, and His world is one. His bounty to the little birds is thus a pledge of His kindness to you. God help you to start life with this happy faith in an All-merciful Father, a deathless Saviour, and an endless heaven.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LILIES: A FLOWER-STUDY FOR SPRING.

“Consider the lilies of the field.”—*MATT.* vi. 28.

THE Bible has over 250 botanical terms. This is not to be wondered at, as Palestine is a land of flowers; and hence it is also a land of bees and honey. Of its 2500 different flowers, about 500 are found in our country. Some fields in Palestine are literally clothed with scarlet, yellow, and blue; the wild flowers in them are thicker than the daisies in our summer meadows. The Eastern sun gives the colours a brightness they never have in our hazy clime. Christ wishes us to take a walk in the open fields and study these wild flowers that owe nothing to the gardener.

It is a great joy to be an admiring observer of nature. And it is Scriptural, for there is more genial description of nature in the Bible than in all the books of ancient Greece and Rome, and Christ here bids us study “these scriptures of the earth.” The green earth and the blue sea and sky have been so made and painted by God as to soothe, delight, and instruct the mind. You miss many a genuine pleasure if you have not an open eye and mind for the wealth of

beauty around you. "Natural beauties make my heart feel too big for its bosom." So writes Sir Walter Scott of his boyish days. People now-a-days are crowding to museums, exhibitions, and picture galleries. Why, the whole world is a museum, exhibition, and picture gallery. Even in the hedge along the highway the buds among the thorns are as interesting as any flowers, and more wonderful than the masterpieces of man, which people travel thousands of miles to examine. You are to consider the lilies of the field. Many, I daresay, look on them only as the ox does. How much more one man finds in a flower than another does! How many fine thoughts and feelings the poet Burns found shut up in the mountain daisy after his plough had laid it low in the dust. A flower is not a flower alone, a thousand thoughts invest it. "Consider," Christ says, for to look is not so easy as to overlook. Others are like the butterfly, flitting idly from flower to flower; but others visit them as the bee gathering the precious honey. Christ bids you make the flowers your books, and "meditate on these things." I know none better at meditating than the busy bee; it is a splendid student. To meditate is to get to the middle and keep in the middle of a thing; it is from the same root as the words *medium* and *middle*. The studious bee dives into the very heart of the flower, buries itself almost out of sight in it, its whole body shivering with delight. With a hum of satisfaction it opens the honey-sac at the bottom and makes the whole treasure its own. Go

to the bee, thou inattentive scholar, consider her ways, and be wise.

Botanists bring forward many candidates for the honour of being Christ's lilies of the field. The flowers Christ meant would probably be the commonest and the brightest in the fields. These would be,



THE ANEMONE OF PALESTINE.

I should think, the anemones, which are often of a bright scarlet, but also of purple and pink and white colour. Many writers think that Christ had specially in His eye the crimson anemones, whose velvet-like bloom covers many an acre. The wild tulips and the

wild poppies (very like our own) can scarcely be distinguished from the anemones except by the botanist. These three flowers are really the queens of the meadows, and are still very common at Nazareth and around the Mount on which our text was spoken. These give to many an acre in Palestine a blaze of scarlet colour. Probably thousands of these very flowers were in sight of Christ's audience; and one traveller suggests that the children might have gathered a bouquet of them and given them to the rabbi, as the children do at this very day. The state garments of King Solomon (v. 29) would have many beautiful hues, though the royal scarlet and purple would be the prevailing colours; and such exactly are the colours of the *wild anemones, tulips, and poppies*. Syrian poppies are now favourites in our gardens. They have all the brilliant colours I have mentioned, and are probably the descendants of the flowers which supplied our text. Like them, they are short-lived, "the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven." The grass, with all its flowers, is used for heating the oven, as fuel is very scarce in the East.

In considering the lily, we shall examine—

- I. Its Soil.
- II. Its Roots.
- III. Its Growth.
- IV. Its Glory.

I wish that my thoughts were as welcome to you

as are the flowers and sunshine of this bright May morning.

I. *Its Soil.*

Consider first where the lily grows: it springs out of the common clod: it is the child of the mother earth. What a contrast between the two, and yet they are so near! Whittier speaks of—

“The fair democracy of flowers
That equals cot and palace.”

On nearly every Scottish heath you may find as beautiful flowers as eye ever beheld. In the bog you often come upon the grass of Parnassus, with its exquisite cream-coloured flowers, its delicate veins, and its white hairs. On the moor, besides the golden gorse and broom and the flowering heather, you are sure to find at least four of the most graceful of wild flowers: the tormentil, with its slender stems and yellow leaves; the butterwort, with its fat parchment-like leaves at the bottom, its slender stem, and large purple nodding flowers; the milkwort, with its crested blossoms of a deep blue, purple, pink, or white tint; and the eye-bright, with its bright green leaves and lilac blossoms streaked with purple. You should have some sort of sympathy with all these flowers, for, like yourself, they are living things, and they demonstrate to you some of the laws of life. You sometimes feel keenly that certain parts of your life are low and rude. You spend more than a third of every day, just as

the animals spend it, in eating, drinking, and sleeping. You have also to endure much that is mean and humiliating. All these things are the cold clay out of which the loveliest lily may spring. The fairest flowers in Christ's garden often grow in the meanest surroundings. Christ Himself was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. It is very touching to find a great saint in a little garret. Men of whom the world was not worthy were clothed in sheepskins and goatskins, and glad to find a shelter in dens and caves of the earth. God has often lifted the beggar from the dunghill, and set him among the princes of His people. Think of the Prodigal Son, Onesimus, and John Bunyan. In India beautiful lilies grow in the foulest canals, and supply the Indians with their favourite emblem of a saint.

Without the soil you could not have the brilliant lily. You prize the soil for the sake of what God rears upon it. Likewise honour earth for its relations to heaven; not for what it is, but for what it may yield. This poor life is the raw material out of which the heavenly life is woven. If you keenly feel the degradations and defilements around you—the mean, crooked things people do, the shameful behaviour of near relatives, &c.—remember that the lily so grows as to carry up out of the dirty soil only the elements of perfect beauty; for it carries up from the clod none of its cloddishness, nor has its beautiful flower any token of the black unsightly seed from which it grew. By God's great grace you may do likewise.

Consider also where the lily begins to grow, or—

II. *Its Root.*

In every lily there is a bulb or seed, whence the roots grow down and the stalk springs up. In that bulb dwells the mystery we call the life of the plant. You may have the bulb without the life, and then your lily is no more to you than a little clod or a ball of brown paper. You may take away every other part of the plant, and it will still live, but if you injure the central bulb it dies.

Now every lily must have a root of its own. And so must every Christian. The root is a most personal thing; it cannot be borrowed from another, you see that at once. Your mother's religion or your country's religion cannot do for you. Your parents can give you their name, their bodily features, their blood, their social position, and their money, but they cannot give you their Christian life. The pastor can give you baptism, but he can't give you grace. The Church can do much for you, but it cannot save you. You may be the Christless child of Christian parents, and a heathen at heart, while a communicant in the best church in the world. Only by your own faith and choice can you be rooted and grounded in the sacred soil. Some who seem religious when at home cast all religion behind them when they go to London, or New York, or Paris, or Calcutta. In heathen lands they scarcely remember what day of the week is the Lord's day; in many things they

outheathen the heathen around them. Christ tells us the reason of this lamentable decay: "And because they had no root, they withered away."

From the soil and the seed our orderly thoughts rise to the lily's lengthening stem, or—

III. *Its Growth.*

The lilies of the field are famous growers, because they are more receptive than some other plants. Their pores are always open, and, like very drunkards, they are always drinking by a thousand mouths the sunshine, the shower, the dew, and the moisture in the earth. They are thus ever receiving all gentle influences, and so grow quietly by night and day. You are not rooted to one spot like the lilies, but you can move about and shun and choose. You will grow if you constantly drink in the water of life which comes to you by the Word of God, prayer, and Christian worship and companionship. The lily is the son of the sun, and the inhabitant of sun-bathed fields. So you must bathe your soul in the sunshine of redeeming love, and live on the sunny side of the hill. The great discovery of our age is that light can be changed into force. This law certainly reigns in the region of the soul. Feel that you can never have enough of the light of God's love, and every particle of that light will become life in you. Are you afraid that your life will droop and die like some blighted lily? Then remember that God shelters the lilies though they bloom only for a day, and every

child of God is a flower to bloom for ever. Even in the desert we saw under sheltering stones some plants that were as full of water as the skin bags on the backs of the water-carriers. When you cut these plants the water bursts out. He who keeps these plants alive in the stony desert will not forsake the plants of righteousness which His own right hand has planted.

Growth is one of the mightiest things in the world. A living seed will burst asunder stones riveted with iron; it will eat into marble and granite; it will triumph over all the hindrances in dead matter; it will find or make a way for itself into God's sunshine. It is said that little seeds have done more to destroy buildings in the East than has been done by wars, violence, storms, and earthquakes. Beautiful gentians find a way of growing even under the snow. Let the lilies rebuke your fears. As they press past the hard clods into spring, so you may grow in grace in spite of earthly hindrances.

The lilies grow heavenward and earthward and all round, and so give us a beautiful model of that harmonious growth and development which is the perfection of manhood and womanhood.

When using the lily as an object-lesson, Christ is at pains to point out—

IV. *Its Beauty.*

It surpassed even Solomon's royal robes (v. 29), than which skill and money could produce nothing more

beautiful. The microscope reveals a world of beauty in these flowers that is hid from the unassisted eye. And this beauty came to the lilies without effort: "They toil not, neither do they spin." They drew it all from the sun. As the poetess says, they learnt, by gazing on the sun, to imitate his shining. These beautiful lilies should teach us trust in God, humility, and gracefulness.

1. *Trust in God.* For Who gives the lilies clothing will clothe His people too. Christ's argument here is from the less to the greater. If God does so very much for the grass, which after a single day's bloom is used to fire the baker's oven, will He not do much more for you, His own children? A Christian, considering God's world, may fairly reason in this way: If God's bounty in nature is so great, surely His bounty in grace will be greater; if He does so much for the anemones, tulips, and poppies, surely He will do more for men, women, and children; if He does so much for my body, surely He will do more for my soul; if He does so much unasked, surely He will do more when asked; if He does so much for enemies, surely He will do more for His friends; if He does so much to furnish my earthly home, surely He will do more for my eternal home! These arguments have an enormous force.

You all know that the argument in our text saved the life of Mungo Park, when about to perish in the African desert. "The extraordinary beauty of a small moss," as he tells us, not larger than the top of one of his fingers, "irresistibly caught" his eye, and he

reasoned that the God who was so mindful of the moss would not forget a creature formed after His own image. In Dr. Delitzsch's "Iris" (p. 138) I have discovered a sister-story quite as beautiful. Count de Charney was imprisoned by Bonaparte in the rocky fortress of Fenestrelle. A little plant grew up between two of the paving-stones in the prison court. With tender affection he named it Picciola, that is, his dear little pet. When lying very ill the gaoler surprised him with the news that it was in flower. With a great effort he rose, and had his favourite, with its crown of coloured and fragrant flowers, before him. From that moment he felt a new life pervade his body, and not only his body, but his soul. What advantage, said he to himself, have the flowers from their splendid perfume? Do they enjoy it themselves? No. Is it for lower animals? No; for never was either a sheep or a dog seen standing before a rose and inhaling its perfume. This perfume, then, is for man. And why for him? A heartless infidel, who till then had no other God than accident, that flower, rightly read, led him up to hope and God, and gave life a new charm. The daughter of a fellow-prisoner secretly carried a written petition from him to the Emperor that the two paving-stones, which threatened the life of his beloved flower, might be taken up. Afterwards she became the Count's wife, and in her widowhood she wore on her breast a costly medallion, in which was set a colourless withered flower. It was the flower that had brought new life to her husband.

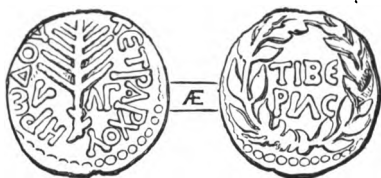
2. The lilies rebuke the pride of dress which makes some youths foolish and heartless by inclining them to give to their clothes what heart they have. King Solomon, with hundreds toiling and spinning for him, could not rival the dress of the flowers. Moreover, his royal robes were made with great toil, and were a thing apart from himself, whereas the lilies had a living and an effortless beauty. True taste in dress is marked by chaste simplicity; a great display is a token of vulgarity. King Croesus the millionaire once asked Solon the sage if he had ever seen anything as beautiful as himself upon the throne. "Yes," was the reply; "a pheasant, a peacock, and every cock upon your dung-hill."

"You may boast of jewels, coronets—
Ermine, purple—all you can;
There is that *within* them nobler,
Something that we call a man!
Something all the rest surpassing,
As the flower is to the sod,
As to man is high archangel,
As to archangel—God!"

3. Christ's words also teach us *gracefulness*. The flowers of the field declare God to be a lover of beauty, and I know that Christ is a lover of neatness. For John tells us (chap. xx. 7) that when Peter came to the empty sepulchre he saw the linen clothes lying, "and the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself." If He loves beauty in the perishable, He must love it in the imperishable—in the soul and the

character. Hence the King's daughter is all glorious within. Some daughters are content with being all glorious without. In the New Testament the most common word for "the good" means literally the *beautiful*, and every Christian virtue is called "a grace"—that is, a beauty. The beautiful is the perfection of the good, and in God's eye only the good are beautiful, while the bad are vile and ugly. Admire beauty of soul more than painters or poets admire the beauty that appeals to the senses.

We love to crowd our gardens with beauty, and we gather it in flowers and give it to our friends. May not our very gardens rise up against us in the day of judgment and condemn us? How we till and water them, while we let the garden of the soul lie a neglected thing, as if it were not our own, or not worth any trouble! Let us resolve from this day to take a greater interest in the garden within than we ever have taken in any spot of earth, and prayerfully do our best to rear flowers more beautiful than the lilies, and which shall be unwithering in the heavens.



CHAPTER XII.

GOD'S PENNY.

"Shew me a penny."—LUKE xx. 24 ; MARK xii. 15 ; MATT. xxii. 19.

ONE day Christ's enemies set a clever trap for Him. After some words of praise they asked, "Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Cæsar, or no?" His questioners thought it no sin to rob Cæsar of his dues. I fear that some people nowadays are quite willing to smuggle, and to defraud the revenue by making a false return of their income. Sometimes conscience smites them for this, and they send in what is called "conscience-money"—that is, the money they had kept back when paying their taxes. But with many of the Jews in Christ's day it was counted a good sign of patriotism and piety not to pay taxes to the heathen Cæsar. Many of them thought that the payment of taxes to the Roman was an act of dishonour to the God of Israel, and even the use of the Roman money sorely perplexed their consciences. These feelings led to the wars in which so many

thousands of the Jews perished. This was the reason why they scorned as traitors to their country the publicans or gatherers of the *public* taxes. Had Christ said that they should not pay taxes, they would have declared Him to be the enemy of Cæsar; and had He said that they should pay taxes, they would have denounced Him as no patriot. Jesus, knowing their craftiness, said, "Shew me a penny." At the beginning of this sermon you have a picture of the very penny that was shown to Christ. It has on the one side a palm-branch and the name of *Herod the Tetrarch*, and on the other *Tiberias*, the name of his capital. It was the commonest coin among the Romans, and called a *denarius*.¹ As it was of silver, it should be called a shilling rather than a penny. It has given the D in our L, S, D, which is borrowed from the Latin *libræ, solidi, denarii*, the names of the three chief Roman coins. Our penny has on one side Neptune, the god of the sea, with his trident, and also Eddystone lighthouse, and a vessel sailing safely. All these are signs that we owe much to the sea, and that "Britannia rules the waves." The other side of our penny displays the Queen's head, with the inscription around it, "Victoria D. G. Britt: Reg: F: D." that is, in full, *Victoria Dei Gratia Britannicæ Regina, Fidei Defensor: Victoria*, by the Grace of God, Queen of Britain, Defender of the Faith. Our penny makes a noble

¹ The silver penny was the only coin current among the Anglo-Saxons. It was so deeply marked with the cross that it could be easily halved and quartered. This is the origin of our words halfpence and farthings.

confession. The penny in Christ's hand, of which you have here an engraving, had Cæsar's head in the centre and Cæsar's name and titles at its circumference. Probably holding the penny in His palm, or between the thumb and forefinger, Christ asked, "Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto Him, Cæsar's." As was often His way, He surprised them with a quick turn in the conversation, and, rising by one step from the earthly to the heavenly, He defeated them with their own weapon by saying, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." That was a perfect object-lesson. And it told; for "they marvelled at His answer and held their peace;" they "left Him, and went their way."

Our theme is *God's Penny: its Story*. That story has five chapters—

- I. The Penny marked.
- II. The Penny stolen.
- III. The Penny claimed.
- IV. The Penny restored.
- V. The Penny possessed.

The great Teacher, by His good Spirit, make this object-lesson delightfully plain to me and you! I begin with—

I. *The Penny marked.*

That penny in Christ's hand was Cæsar's money, because its owner's head and name were upon it.

But you are God's infinitely more than that penny was Cæsar's. Cæsar had not created the silver in the penny, nor had he made it with his own hands, nor had he himself put his stamp upon it, nor had he ever shielded it from injury. I suppose that Cæsar had never even touched that particular penny. But God has created you out of the dust of the earth, and set His mint-mark upon every part of you. He is also re-creating you every night by sweet sleep, and every day by sunshine and food; and by millions of mercies He has preserved you from millions of deaths, and brought you to this blessed hour. You owe everything to Him but your sin and sorrow.

The manufacturer first makes his articles, and then sets his trade-mark upon the outside of them; the artist first paints his picture, and then writes his name in the corner; but God has put His marks in you, and through and through every part of you. You are not like the English penny in Oliver Cromwell's day. It had "The Commonwealth of England" on the one side, and "God with us" on the other. "Oh, I see," said a Cavalier, the enemy of Cromwell, "God and the Commonwealth are on different sides." Nor are you like the Greek coins, on which were stamped a Helena on the one side and a Hecuba on the other, a rose and a deadly aconite, a Paris and an Æsop. Your physical as well as your spiritual side bears God's superscription. Take up a bracken, cut its stem slantwise, and you will find the German eagle everywhere within it. A friend was showing me a

banknote that had in very small type the name of the bank in every part of it. You are marked more thoroughly than that fern or that banknote is. God's image is in you, God's superscription is all over you. Your body is a museum and exhibition of the masterpieces of God's wisdom, love, and power. How fearfully and wonderfully you are made! Surely the world could not make you, nor Satan, nor yourself, nor blind chance. Surely those men of science are wrong who tell you that you were made by nothing. Your mind is like God's, so far as the finite can be like the infinite; for you can know God and His works. I was lately reading a book written by a madman, every page of which made me feel that my mind was quite different from his, and that it refused to move along the same lines and keep step with his. But when I study God's works I feel that my mind, in its own poor limited way, works in harmony with my Creator's. And you are like God in the soul, for man at first was made by God, made like God, and made for God. Man made by God—how wonderful! It is your conscience that most plainly proves you to be of God's making, though sadly damaged by sin. God's image in us is like the Queen's image on many a well-worn penny: it is sadly rubbed away, marred, and discoloured, but there it still is, a plain proof that the penny is not a mere bit of brass, but a current coin of the realm. Your "make," in body, mind and soul, reveals your Maker and only rightful Owner. But God, like Cæsar,

does not always receive His own, and so I have now to tell you of—

II. *The Penny Stolen.*

“Will a man rob God?” Malachi asks (iii. 8). Many in Malachi’s day did rob God, for they kept back from Him what was His own and His due; they robbed Him of their hearts, their offerings, and their talents. All these, in their hands, were stolen goods, which they treacherously gave to God’s enemy. You are not to fancy that only monsters of wickedness rob God, for some people seem to do what is just to every one but their Maker. This is one reason why sin is called a debt. The parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son, all show how God’s most prized goods may be pilfered from Him. Not to give ourselves to Him is a spiritual theft. Every godless child makes heaven emptier, Christ’s carse poorer, and God’s joy less—I speak after the manner of men. If you are not Christ’s you are a young robber, and you can easily be convicted of having a stolen penny in your possession. Indeed, you are both the thief and the stolen penny. The longer you reject Christ, the greater is the theft; for God claims His own with usury, and when the young heart is stolen from Him, He loses both capital and interest. We talk of base coin: is not a godless soul the basest coin in the world? Stolen money is an awful burden and curse. Who can tell the torments of the man who carries some guilty secret? He is

like a man who has a wild beast in a chest, and must always painfully sit on the lid lest the restless creature should burst it open. I have known men and women who for years endured the horrors of an accusing conscience, and at last were glad to confess all and return the stolen money. Conscience upbraids most the man who has stolen from his benefactor. Is not that the case of the godless man? Conscience and God's striving Spirit spoil the peace of at least the young spiritual thief, for the penny stolen is—

III. *The Penny Claimed.*

The whole Bible is God's claim for His own penny. This claim is pressed from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, and also by all the strivings of the Spirit with the Christless. God's marks upon you may be tarnished and dimmed, but can never be wholly rusted out. The most thorough-going infidel writer of our day, Ibsen, says, "You can never understand it, you who have never been in the power of this God-man. It is more than a doctrine which He has spread over the world; it is a charm which has fettered the senses. Whoever falls into His hands never becomes quite free again." Yes, God is always claiming the penny He has made and marked. God wants you. Only old and hardened sinners can keep back God's penny without having often to feel shame for the theft. Every godless man is the penny, the thief, and the receiver all in one. When a thief is caught with a marked penny in his hand, he finds it useless to deny

his guilt. Have you never done so when you were using all God's good gifts only for earth and self? Have you never felt keenly that you were doing wrong? That strange, unhappy feeling came from God claiming His penny, and from your unwillingness to give it up to the Owner. When the late Earl Cairns died the other year, several biographies of him were published. In one of these I read that when ten years old he heard a Belfast minister saying in his sermon, "God claims you." The words stuck to the boy, and kept echoing in his soul. "God claims me," he said to himself, "and He has a good right to claim me. He made me, and has cared for me, and has sent His Son to die for me. It is a most reasonable claim; what am I going to do with it?" He resolved to yield to it. He became a student, then a lawyer, then an M.P., and at last the Lord Chancellor. His motto to the very end was, "God claims me," and thus he was a consistent and useful Christian.

We all say that we shall have *our rights*, and shall not submit to be wronged out of them. Many people go to law, and spend huge sums of money that they may claim their rights. Shall we hold out when God claims His right in us? *Suum cuique*, "His own to every one," is a good old Latin motto. Make it your own, and add to it, *Bis dat qui cito dat*, "He gives twice who gives quickly," and thus without delay will you own the claims of Christ upon you. For your stolen penny is the penny claimed and reclaimed, and should at once be—

IV. *The Penny Restored.*

The three Evangelists all use the same word in reporting Christ's reply, "render"—that is, give up or give back. There should be a definite, well-understood act of giving up, or yielding, or surrendering yourself to God. Just as your mother sometimes takes up a penny and hands it over to you, so you should take your heart—your very self—as if it were a thing apart, and hand it over to God. Though God claims His penny, He does not apprehend you, and drag it out of your grasp by main force. He has given you the awful power of either keeping it or giving it back, and He receives it only from those who choose to give it. But remember that by your use or abuse of His penny you may brighten into an angel or darken into a fiend. Some will not restore the stolen penny, so that John's touching lament (chap. i. 11) is still true, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The penny is Christ's own without your consent, and He wishes it to be His own with the consent of all that is within you.

You are not to suppose that Christians are all to be like coins from the same mint. Oh no; each is to be himself. As your face is not exactly like the face of anybody else, so your character should have some marks of its own. A thoughtful boy once shouted, as if he had made a great discovery, "I am an *I*." Each young Christian is an *I*, and he might truly say, "I am two *I*'s; the one *I* gives, the other *I* is given to God." We call a man an individual, as if he were strictly one and could

not be divided ; but every man is dual. Two men dwell together in him, and when he deals with God the one is the giver and the other is the gift.

And you must restore the *whole* penny. Our silver and gold coins are *milled*, or toothed, or checked at the edges, because people used to clip bits off and keep the clippings for themselves. The coins were thus light, and had to be weighed to prevent cheating. Abraham weighed out the money for his burying-ground. Though coins in the East to-day, as with us, have a definite name, size, and value, yet some merchants carry a small apparatus by which they weigh each coin, to see that it has not been lessened by Jewish clippers. Be sure you bring to God an unclipped penny. I have read that the Irish Kernes when baptized covered up their right arms, which they wished to be still consecrated to the devil for fighting. In the great things of the soul the law is, *All or nothing*. A clipped penny will not be accepted.

And when you restore your penny you must not take it back. Ah, perhaps you have often given yourself to God, and then recalled the gift. After I had preached this sermon a girl came to me and said something like this, "You took a penny in your hand, and showed us how you might give it to a boy and then take it back from him. You then said that that was what some people did when they restored God's penny. That is exactly what I have done many a time ; but I want now to give myself to Christ, and never take back the gift." In his "Tales of a Grandfather" Sir

Walter Scott mentions a robber he knew who would never shake any person with his right hand, because Prince Charlie had once shaken it. What in us Christ has laid His hand on should be held by us as sacred to Him for ever.

Let me repeat the headings of the chapters in this simple story: the Penny Marked, the Penny Stolen, the Penny Claimed, the Penny Restored; and now the last is—

V. *The Penny Possessed.*

It is never yours till it has been restored, and never safe till it is in better keeping than your own. A child I knew once got a gift of half-a-crown, "a silver penny," from his uncle. Right proud of it was he. He would not let any one touch it; he must have it in his very own hand, and feel sure that it was all his very own. He put it under his pillow at night and slept over it. At last he lost it. With a sorrowful heart he sought for it up and down, and when it was found he gave it to his mother to keep for him. He felt it was his own all the more because it was in her keeping. And in the same way you are to commit your soul in well-doing unto your faithful Creator, for it never can be really your own so long as it is in your own hands only. The penny is yours that you may make it God's.

"How much money have you?" a king in the Middle Ages asked a rich Jew. The Jew mentioned a sum. "Oh, you have far more than that," the king replied. "No," said the Jew; "what I now have is

not mine, for you can take it from me ; what I spent, that I had ; but what I gave away, that I have. I have told you the exact sum that I gave away." Thus you really have only what you have frankly given up to God.

You cannot give up your penny too soon. A country minister was telling me that a summer visitor put into the plate at the church door every Sabbath a new sovereign fresh from the mint. He wished to offer to God virgin gold, unsoiled by worldly uses. Have the same spirit in your handling of God's penny. Bring to the Saviour a young heart, not world-worn, but bearing upon it the fresh, sharp, unsullied marks of the heavenly mint. Thus will you render unto God the things that are God's, and then you will strive to render also to every one what is his due.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

"I am the Good Shepherd."—JOHN x. 11.

WE now know a great deal about the early Christians. Learned men have searched and better searched among the catacombs, and other remains of antiquity, so that the early Christians now live before us. We can easily know their ways quite as well as we know the ways of the Americans or the Irish. For one thing, they were very fond of sign-language and object-lessons; and they had some favourite objects of which they never grew tired. It is very wonderful that they employed only images of joy and peace, though they were so cruelly persecuted. Foremost among these was the Good Shepherd, for Christ was the centre of all their thoughts. Pictures and engravings of Him adorn almost every chapel in the catacombs, and hundreds of seals, rings, vases, and lamps. Now He carries the lamb on His shoulders, again in His bosom. This picture seems to have charmed the very heart of the early Church. They used to open their church-meetings by reading the parable of the Good Shepherd. This subject is almost as great a favourite with us, especially with the young. Every hymn-book,

every child's hymn-book I know, has a great many hymns about the Good Shepherd; and no psalm has been said or sung so often, I believe, as the 23rd. We may thus feel sure that we are in sympathy with all Christians when our hearts to-day gather around the Good Shepherd.

Sheep were very common in Palestine in the time of Christ; and as it was His habit to speak of what was passing before His eyes, sheep were probably in sight when He spoke the words in the tenth chapter of John's Gospel. These words are a sort of parable which holds up before us—

I. The Shepherd.

II. The Shepherdless.

III. The Shepherded.

I. *The Shepherd.*

"I am the Good Shepherd," Christ says. His words mean, I only; there is but One, and I am that One. Lay the stress on the words *I* and *the*. A minister of the Gospel is called a pastor, which is the Latin word for shepherd. He is an under-shepherd, while Christ is "the Chief Shepherd." Christ has no rival, no helper or partner in the shepherding of souls. We read of two folds, Jew and Gentile, but never of two flocks, never of two shepherds. Passing strange that one to the outward eye so poor and helpless as Christ then was should calmly and boldly say, "I am the Good Shepherd;" and should claim all Jews and all

Gentiles as belonging to His fold ; and should denounce as an hireling and robber every other being who disputes His claim. Ask yourself why Christ stands up before all mankind and declares Himself to be the only real Shepherd. That were utter madness were He not more than man, or angel, or archangel. We thus pay homage to Him as God. While more than man, He is also more than a shepherd. The shepherd in the East is, I may say, the god of the sheep ; but for him they should soon perish. But all illustrations fail here. We must add image to image if we would rise toward the sacred height of this great truth. The Puritans said that they found in the Bible no less than one hundred and eight names of Christ.

“Jesus my Saviour, Shepherd, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.”

Five times over in this chapter Christ tells us that He gives His life for the sheep. Many an Eastern shepherd gives or rather loses his life for the sheep. The shepherd is usually the owner of the sheep. Their isolation, their constant companionship, and their common dangers beget an almost human attachment of the sheep to the shepherd and of the shepherd to the sheep. The shepherd's work is often so difficult that few shepherds are hirelings except for a very short time. And sometimes the shepherd loses his life in defending his sheep against robbers or wild

beasts. Many shepherds lose their lives in our own country amid the snow. But Christ freely gave His life for the sheep, and knew beforehand that He was doing so. He died not because He must, but because He chose to die for our salvation. His sheep were lost in the wilderness, amid a thousand dangers, ready to perish, and He went into the wilderness to seek and save them. And He counts even one sheep well worth saving. He leaves the ninety-nine in the fold, and goes after the one that has strayed. The poet speaks of forty cattle feeding like one in the meadow. To the poet the forty are as one, but to the farmer they are forty times one. He has an owner's interest in each of them. In Psalm cxlvii. 3, 4, we read "He healeth the broken in heart. . . . He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." The stars are as a shining flock in the vast plain of heaven, and He, their shepherd, knows and names each of them. He has also a flock on earth, and has a like minute and tender knowledge of every sheep in it.

"The Good Shepherd" is literally the beautiful, or noble shepherd; for goodness is the highest moral beauty. Surely nothing can be more beautiful than Christ's unwearying love in seeking the lost. Are all your thoughts of Him dull and cold? Have you never felt His beauty, His kindness, His surpassing grace, His excellences and attractions? Do you never heartily thank God for "the Good Shepherd"?

I have come upon what is said to be "the oldest

Christian hymn." It may have been sung by "the beloved disciple" who has given us our text. Here are two of its verses as translated from the Greek—

"Shepherd of tender youth,
Guiding in love and truth,
Through devious ways ;
Christ, our triumphant King,
We come Thy name to sing,
And here our children bring,
To shout Thy praise.

Ever be Thou our Guide,
Our Shepherd and our pride,
Our staff and song !
Jesus ! Thou Christ of God !
By the perennial word
Lead us where Thou hast trod,
Make our faith strong."

Think now of—

II. *The Shepherdless Soul.*

You know that the sheep in Palestine are quite different from our sheep. In our lowland fields sheep are safe even amid the snows of winter, but the sheep of the East need a shepherd almost as much as an infant needs a nurse. Our frontispiece is a picture from life of the modern shepherd of Palestine. He has a big oak club, with a spiked head, swinging from his girdle, and a long pole in his hand. These are "the rod and the staff" of the 23rd Psalm. With the staff or crook he guides and encourages the sheep, and with the club or rod he drives off wolves and robbers. Then every Eastern shepherd is a good bone-

setter, for often his sheep backslide, or slide backwards over the sharp rocks or stones, and break their bones. The sheep must be brought into the fold at night, and by day they are often in danger, and know not where to find pasture and water. Our sheep leave only some of their wool on thorn-bushes, but in the East thorn-bushes are very many and very strong, and the sheep caught in them often cannot struggle into freedom. Even the flesh of men is sometimes "torn with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers" (Judges viii. 7). You remember how, when Abraham was about to offer up Isaac, he saw a ram caught in the thicket. Moreover, the strayed sheep usually loses its wits, and cannot find its way to the fold. Marco Polo tells us that the Tartar robbers in the dark months used to ride on mares whose foals were at home; and when the robbers had taken their prey, they just laid the reins on the mares' necks, and they went straight home in the darkest night. But even in broad daylight the sheep has no home-finding instinct. In the desert, far from its proper good, it can only lie down and die. And such is the soul without the Good Shepherd—a lonely outcast, girt round with all sorts of dangers. I may again borrow an illustration from Marco Polo. He tells us that when travellers linger behind the desert caravan a shadowy voice calls them by their name and allures them from their route. They follow, and still it calls; and, when they have wandered from the path, a mocking silence follows more terrible than the deceiv-

ing voice. The wind of evening has lifted the light sands, and quietly covered the marks of feet and camel-hoofs upon the wilderness, as the breeze smooths the wakes of ships on the yielding deep. Nothing is left for the bewildered traveller but to lie down and die.

I have known several young people who have been more deeply moved by the tenth chapter of John's Gospel than by any other words in the Bible. The picture of the lost sheep seemed to them very sad; it interested their imagination; they owned that it was true; then they felt that it was the picture of themselves. Thus God's good Spirit moved them to self-pity; they thought of the Good Shepherd; they plainly heard His voice, and gave themselves up to Him.

Dr. Samuel Johnson, in his "Lives of the British Poets," tells us that he visited William Collins the poet during his last illness. Collins confessed that he then cared for only one book. Johnson took it into his hand; it was an English New Testament, such as children carry to the school. "I have but one book," said Collins, "but that is the best." During his youth he had wandered from the fold into the desert, but trial had revealed to him the miseries of the shepherdless soul. His marble monument in Chichester Cathedral is a beautiful poem and an eloquent sermon. His lyre and poems lie neglected on the ground, while his Bible lies open before him. Only in his Bible did he find the green pastures and the still waters that refresh the world-weary soul.

Have you felt yet how Christ appeals to the deepest needs of your heart—to your sense of sin, to your need of forgiveness, of guidance, of strength and comfort, to your longings for love and goodness? What a pity that many, like the poet Collins, do not find out their need of Christ, till the shadow of death has fallen upon them.

It is a delight to join ourselves now to—

III. *The Shepherded Soul.*

It is saved by the Shepherd's hand, led by His voice, is fed by Him, and follows Him. Let alone, that strayed sheep must have perished miserably in the desert. Then Christ says, "My sheep hear My voice:" mark you, not My truth, nor My words, but My *voice*. To them He is a living, present, speaking Saviour. The gentle whisperings of His Spirit are heard in their souls, and they know for certain whose voice it is. He gives His voice for their ear-guidance, and His footprints for their sight-guidance. And it is sweetest music to them. The early Christians placed Orpheus with his lyre among their favourite symbols. Orpheus thus served a double purpose, for he reminded them of the drawing power of Christ, and he also did not arouse the fury of the heathens. You know the legend about him: he was the master of heavenly music, and his lyre was the gift of Apollo, the god of light.

"Therefore, the poet

Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones, and floods ;
Since nought so stockish, hard, and full of rage,
But music for the time doth change his nature."

The old-world story ran that Orpheus was in the good ship *Argo* with the Argonauts, when, charmed by the wicked songs of the Sirens, they turned the prow to the fatal isle. Orpheus then tuned his lyre, and the music of the Sirens seemed but a rude, jarring noise compared with his heavenly strains. The sailors, moved by a better delight, at once steered away from their seducers, and were rescued from a shameful death. These fables are facts with us, the early Christians said. Christ is our Divine Orpheus, for His music has broken the spell of all the Sirens of sinful pleasure, and has moved our rude stony hearts, and charmed us into following Him.

And the sheep are fed by the shepherd: "They go in and out, and find pasture" (ver. 9). Shepherd in Hebrew means a feeder. It would not avail if the shepherd did not also feed the sheep he has saved. A sultan once promised to spare the life of his enemy if he gave up his sword. When the disarmed warrior asked for food the sultan replied, "I promised to save your life, but not to feed you," and left his prisoner to die of starvation. Christ both saves and satisfies. He has an overflowing plenty of all that can feed the heart. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." He leads them by "the pastures of tender grass," as it is on the margin of the 23rd Psalm. What a perfect picture that psalm gives of perfect satisfaction.

And Christ's sheep follow Him: this is their proper

mark. Montaigne says, "I lend my life to others, but give myself to myself." The Christian gives himself to his Saviour. Christ has shaped His life for your sake, and it is only fair that you should shape your life for His sake.

And Christ's sheep are safe for ever. "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand" (vers. 28, 29). Very bold words are these. Plainly Christ triumphs in the truth He here utters. If you wish anything to be very safe, you keep it in your closed hand. Here the soul is kept in Christ's closed hand, and God's hand is closed over both, so that the precious treasure is doubly safe. Two Almighty's stand between it and danger. The great robber would fain snatch it away, but he cannot, for it is a question of strength.

The Good Shepherd guides and guards His sheep through life's dark valley, and through the darkest at its close, and then feeds them for ever among the green pastures and living waters of heaven.

I have two closing words: To save the young must be easier than to save the old, whose every year has taken them farther from the fold. Our Saviour is speaking of grown-up people when He says (Luke xix. 10), "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." He has both to seek and save them; the double phrase intimates the double

difficulty of the task. In Matthew xviii. 11 He is speaking of the young only, and He says, "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." It would seem that they can be saved without extra seeking. Ye young, listen to the Shepherd's voice now, and He will lead you to light and life and joy.

My other word is this: "When the Good Shepherd has found His lost sheep, He layeth it on His shoulders, rejoicing" (Luke xv. 5). The lamb or tender lamb-kin on His shoulder is a less burden, and gives Him, we may believe, not less joy. Will you refuse Him that joy? Will you? Don't you hear your heart replying, "No, never." Amen: so let it be.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GADARENE DEMONiac.

MATT. viii. 28 ; MARK v. 1 ; LUKE vii. 26.

GADARA, or Gergesa, is on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. Its modern name is Khersa, which is believed to be a shortened form of Gergesa. I have visited it twice, and each time the story of the demoniac rose vividly before my mind. I saw many tombs in the hillside there, and the people sometimes still use them for shelter—"cave life" is still common in Palestine. The slope to the lake is steep, and the water is deep at the shore; along the neighbouring river Yarmuk there is still such pasture as suits swine; and the ground had been dug up, as we were told, by the wild swine searching for roots and earth-nuts. The swine are very fond of the liquorice root, which abounds there. All these features, you see, agree exactly with this story.

Our Saviour had just crossed the lake in a great storm which had almost sent the little craft to the bottom. The Divine Passenger was sound asleep; but, though the fury of the storm did not awake Him, the cry of His distressed disciples did. He arose and rebuked the storm. Having just stilled

the storm on the lake, He now stills the fiercer storm in the heart of this poor madman. For He blesses men equally by sea and land.

As this strange scene rises before us, we fix our eye upon—

I. The Madman.

II. The Christ.

III. The New Man.

I. *The Madman.*

His was no ordinary case of madness, for he was under the power of devils. So thoroughly was he their slave, that when Christ asked his name they replied for him, "My name is legion, for we are many." They thus claimed him as completely their own. So strong were they that they likened themselves to a legion—that is, a company of 6000 Roman soldiers. They had dethroned his reason, and mastered both his soul and his body. This is a very dark subject, and some parts of it we cannot in the least explain. Some modern doctors, who can speak with authority upon this subject, believe that in our day men are possessed by evil spirits; and a dragoman told me that a native of Palestine near the Sea of Galilee said to him in a rage, "You are devil-possessed." This poor man had become wild and lonely, and he was often wounding his own flesh. He had enormous strength, as madmen often have. His madness was increased by the harsh usage men like him then

received. Madness was very common in that age, as it always is in times of revolution.

That man is a true picture of the mischief sin works when it gains perfect mastery. I am sure that I have known men who were exactly like him in all the main features of his case. It fills the soul with awe to think how gently and insensibly the power of sin may grow, till at last it makes the sinner a helpless slave. The child who might have brightened into an angel sometimes darkens into a fiend. For the Evil One, man's great enemy, still tempts men, and binds his chains about them. If a boy has been tempted into a dark sin by a boy older and craftier than himself, I have more hope of that boy than I should have if he had gone into the sin without any companion. So if there be not an Evil One, I must regard man as a devil. I am very sure that sin still makes men perfectly mad. Many of the best men and women by some mysterious affliction lose their reason, but thousands lose it by yielding to evil passions. Like this man, they are unfit for work; they hate their fellows; they bleed from self-made wounds; and they have lost their manhood and their liberty, and are the mere football of their passions. If Christ made us suffer in His service what sinners bring upon themselves, heaven and earth should soon hear our piteous complaints. All sin seems madness when we think rightly about it. An advocate, lately defending a man charged with murder, urged that no adequate reason

had been assigned for the crime. The judge, in summing up, replied that there never could be an adequate reason for such a crime, as murder was always a moral madness. We may say the same of all sins. We call confirmed drunkards dipsomaniacs, that is, thirst-madmen; and the old Scotch law calls a drunkard a voluntary demon. Only last week a young man who has come under the power of strong drink told me that he had had an awful struggle during the whole night, and that he felt "in the very grip of the devil." I was in a sad mood when I left him, but at once there struck my ear the joyous laughter and loud shoutings of hundreds of children in the playground. How bright and happy these boys and girls were, I thought, and what splendid promise for the days to come. But I reflected that the young thirst-madman I had left was once as fine a boy as any in that bright throng, and I feared that, unless the drinking habits of our country greatly change, many of these beautiful boys and girls would one day be in the grasp of the drink-fiend. There was a strange idea very common in the Middle Ages, that some people made a covenant with Satan, which was duly signed and sealed. He was to give them the *run* of all earth's pleasures, and in the end he was to have their soul for his own. In spite of a thousand miseries and warnings, some live under our eyes as if they had really made such a bargain, and had resolved not to break it, come what might. Other sins besides drunkenness make many like this poor

maniac in his rags and sweltering wounds. You can scarcely believe how far a sinful man may fall, and how utterly he may lose all his will-power, and become like a rudderless ship in a stormy sea. I state these sorrowful facts not to sadden you, but to fill you with a horror of all sin, even of its gentle and little-noticed beginnings. Behold in this madman a lifelike picture of what any boy or girl may become by yielding to the evil around and within.

Turn your gaze now upon—

II. *The Christ.*

Christ and the madman stand face to face. What a difference! And yet both are men. Two kingdoms meet here. Christ fully represents the kingdom of light, the miserable madman the kingdom of darkness.

The one hopeful thing about the madman was Christ's presence. "For the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." Christ has a medicine equal to the malady.

Amid the world's sins and miseries, of which we have a share, our hope for ourselves and others is to get as near Christ as ever we can, to appeal to Him, to listen to His words, and to know His healing power. Often Christ meets us when we do not seek Him, as He met this Gadarene. But we can seek Him, as there are ever so many ways of coming near Him. I will give you a small bunch of flowers gathered during my holidays. I have just been reading the life of Colonel Gardiner, as I am now (while writing this sermon)

living on the battlefield of Prestonpans, where he died the death of a brave soldier. When about thirty years of age he was with the British Embassy at the court of Paris. He was then a favourite of fortune and darling of nature; had splendid health, and great popularity, and enough of money, and a full cup of earthly pleasure. The French courtiers "called him by a dreadful kind of compliment, 'the happy rake.'" But he was not happy, for when a dog came into his room, "he could not forbear groaning inwardly, and saying of himself, 'Oh, that I were that dog!'" One Sabbath evening he had an idle hour between his guilty pleasures. To kill the time he took up a religious book which his good mother or aunt had slipped into his portmanteau. The reading of it turned his thoughts towards Christ upon the Cross, and he felt as if a voice were saying to him, "Oh, sinner! did I suffer this for thee, and are these thy returns!" He became a new man, and one of Scotland's great Christians. Another famous Christian was born near the same spot. The other evening I visited the monument of Robert Moffat, the African missionary, in his native village of Ormiston. On leaving his very humble home at the age of sixteen, his mother, before saying farewell to him on the road, made him promise that he would read a chapter of the Bible every morning, and another every evening. "Oh, Robert, my son," she said, "read much in the New Testament. Read much in the gospels—the blessed gospels. Then you cannot well go astray. If you pray, the Lord Himself will teach you." He never

forgot his promise to his mother. As he read, the question often darted into his mind, "What think ye of Christ?" He was afraid of the question, but it would not let him alone, and he soon became a Christian. If a youth were to read his Bible daily and honestly, and ask himself questions about it, I should expect him soon to become a Christian. Many a youth has been brought to Christ by his Christian companion. Many boys and girls seem formed to be influenced by others. To them interesting society is the sweetest thing in all the world. The power their comrades have over them is like a mighty spell or some wonderful enchantment. All other powers put together are not equal to it. Thrice blessed, then, are they whose companions lead them on to what is pure and noble. In many other ways—by frequenting the house of God, by giving up every known sin, &c.—you can get near Christ. Though He is never far from you, you may be in heart very far from Him. Try to get as near Him as ever you can, and stretch out the hands of your heart to Him, that He may heal your soul before sin has wrought such havoc in it as you witness in this raving Gadarene.

III. *The New Man.*

Behold him now sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. I suppose that his friends or the disciples had given him decent clothing, and he is sitting as having now rest and peace.

"His very face with change of heart is changed,"
and he is listening with reverence and gratitude to

the words of Jesus. What a difference between him and his former self. Tennyson paints for us the mighty hall that Merlin built for King Arthur long ago.

“And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall :
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
And over all one statue in the mould
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown
And peak'd wings pointed to the northern star.”

But the Church has six great zones of sculpture. In the lowest devils are slaying men, and on the highest stands no shadowy creation of the poet, but the perfect man Jesus Christ. Pointing to Him, we can say, We have still a King who can deliver us from all our foes. What a heart-refreshing scene this healed madman is! The mere thought of it does us good, like a sound sleep after fatigue, like sunshine after a storm, like a wholesome meal to the hungry. It makes us more hopeful about everybody and everything. We secretly rejoice in such power and such goodwill to men.

I am sure you wish to miss none of the lessons of this exquisite story. You will get them by gazing with delight upon this charming scene, and drinking in the spirit of it.

It teaches us to look with great pity and hope even upon those whom sin has made perfectly mad. A minister once told Dr. Chalmers that he had visited a madman. “Did you pray with him?” the Doctor

asked. "No," was the reply. "Ah, you did wrong; you should have prayed with him. Perhaps some of your words might have touched a chord in his heart, and brought him back to healthier days. Christ has ways of reaching minds in which reason has been dethroned." This story also teaches us that no man is too bad for Christ to cure. The most unworthy He counts well worth every effort to save them. I am sure that many in our day, who seemed about as hopeless as this man was, have been brought back to their right mind, and have kept in the ways of Christ for years. I have been visiting some who were once the wildest of the wild, and who for more than twenty years—some of them for thirty years—have lived worthy Christian lives. It has done me good to see them, and I have written a book about them, and might easily write more. Their stories vividly recall the madman of Gadara. Oh, what earthly blessings the religion of Christ has brought to them, and how beautifully some of them acknowledge the good they owe to Christ, who cures both soul and body, and gives a prodigality of blessing for time and eternity.

It has been the habit to strike medals in memory of great events and causes. If we wish a Home Mission medal the very best thing we could do would be to have on the one side of it the Gadarene in his rags and chains, and on the other side the same man sitting at the feet of Jesus.

When his fetters were taken off this man was more fettered than ever, but his new fetters were around the

heart. He could say with David, "O Lord, I am Thy servant . . . Thou hast loosed my bonds." When Miletus of Antioch visited Simeon Stylites, chained on the top of his pillar, he bade them take off the chains, since "to a man that loves God the heart is chain enough."

Notice how genial and sympathetic and eager to spread itself the religion of Christ is. Listen to Christ's last word to this man, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." It is plain enough that grace destroys nothing in our nature but sin and its fruits.

Thank God that you have a religion that has wrought such glorious wonders among the worst of men, and pray that you may always live in the spirit and power of it. Never forget that the Great Healer expects every one of His disciples to be, in his own sphere, a healer of the bleeding sores of mankind. This charming story should make you secretly and earnestly desire that you may have some share in Christ's work of healing men. It is angels' work below—nay, it is the very work of God and Jesus Christ, to bring light and health and joy to the most forlorn of our fellow-men.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HEN AND HER CHICKENS.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"—*MATT. xxiii. 37.*

DOMESTIC fowls are mentioned only twice in the New Testament. As there are no clocks or watches in the East, the crowing of the cock is now, as it always has been, the signal of the dawn. The cock-crowing in Palestine to-day is so frequent and piercing as to spoil the sleep of many a pilgrim. You remember the cock crowing when Peter denied Christ. The hen is mentioned only in our text. Hawks, kites, and birds of prey are very common in Palestine. I wondered why these birds were so tame. Fancy replied that they felt quite at home in a land which has been given for a prey to the spoilers from the days of the Romans to the days of the Turks, and where so many of the natives regard you with the eye of a hawk. It seemed fitting that the birds of prey should look down upon that land as belonging to them. The abundance of birds of prey has always made it very difficult to rear chickens in Palestine. There oftener than elsewhere has the hen to gather her chickens under her wings.

The hen is not a favourite with the poets. They prefer the eagle, the bird of empire, strong in beak and claw and wing ; or the dove, emblem of gentleness and peace ; or the robin-redbreast, with his direct appeal to our human sympathies. For some reason the hen has not drawn around her any pleasing associations : she suggests ridicule rather than reverence. But just because she is so homely and common, she suits the uses of Christ when He brings great truths under our senses. When He points to the hen and her chickens every undignified idea retires, and your imagination at once clothes her with the sacred ideas of motherhood and self-sacrifice. You feel at once the charm and simplicity of this image, for Christ presents it to us without any cunning embroidery. It simplifies and beautifies great truths, and an infant can scarcely miss its meaning.

This object illustrates—

- I. The Willing Saviour.
- II. The Unwilling Sinner.
- III. The Willing Sinner.

I. *The Willing Saviour.*

Christ declares Himself as willing to save the people in Jerusalem as the mother-hen is to shelter her chickens. How mysterious is the mother-love of the hen for her brood. Every power in her has gone into love for them ; and this love gives her a strange energy, which has in it something like the Divine. I have

often seen a big dog, or a bullock, or a horse wandering in among the little chickens. Had the hen been alone she would have fled at once in terror, but the mother-instinct is mighty within her. Love supplies her with rage and arms and courage; her body swells to an unwonted size; she dashes at the intruders with such suddenness and fury that they are put to flight. This instinct in the mother-bird is never lessened nor chilled while the chickens need her help. It always absorbs her whole nature, and it is always active. I have never heard of a hen unwilling to save her chickens. And the shelter she gives is wonderfully warm and tender, for she covers them with her feathers and draws them close to her throbbing heart. And all that is but a poor picture of the love of Christ. This image emphasises Christ's great care and tenderness, and the homeliness of it should touch our hearts. Even Mahomet says that "God's love of man is more tender than that of the mother-bird for her young." This symbol of the Saviour shows that He is our Shelterer, and that He places His life between us and danger, and treats all comers with the most condescending tenderness. One day when Charles Wesley was sitting at an open window, a little bird pursued by a hawk dashed into his bosom. Mr. Wesley saved it from death, and then took up his pen and wrote the sweet hymn—

"Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly."

Christ's words prove His love. They are words of

melting, overpowering mercy—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." His words are cast in that poetic form which becomes great feeling. There is in them something like the swelling of the wave at tide-time, billow pressing upon billow. Jerusalem is the metropolis, or mother-city, and the citizens are her children. His tears also prove His love (Luke xix. 41). The agonies of Calvary drew no tear from Him, but He wept over Jerusalem. The Redeemer's tears for lost souls are wonderful proofs of His compassion. His acts also add to the proofs of His saving mercy. We must here count up, so far as we can, all His acts from the cradle to the cross, and from the cross to His throne in Heaven. And He loved even the Jerusalem sinners, and was willing to save them. By their behaviour they had made themselves heirs to all the innocent blood shed since Abel's day; and they were about to crucify Him. But His very murderers were the first to be made welcome to the healing virtue of the blood they had shed. This object-lesson overwhelms us with proofs of Christ's willingness to save, and of His power too. Who can this be who feels quite sure that the wings of His love and power are wide enough to shelter not only the two millions of people then in Jerusalem, but the spirits of all the ages? Could any mere creature in his sane mind ever have spoken in that way? Are not these the words of One who knows that He is God? We know Christ to be man by His tears, and to be God by the way in which He speaks. Here is the gospel of the Gospel and the glory of the Bible.

Face to face with the willing Saviour stands—

II. *The Unwilling Sinner.*

Was lament ever sadder than Christ's, "How often would I . . . *and ye would not!*" What an awful *and!* Passing strange that even love Divine, after it has done all, can only weep. Christ's love sometimes calls out man's proud and rebellious resistance. I say nothing about deep, dark questions, to the bottom of which we cannot reach. It is idle to ask here whether God's will is stronger than man's, or whether man could come to Christ without God's help. These Jerusalemites did not want to come to Christ; they would not if they could, and so the blame was all their own. Men are not kept from Christ by a natural inability in which they could not if they would, but by a moral inability in which they would not if they could. No one is forced into the shelter. No doubt they had a general willingness to be saved from ruin and hell, but they were not willing to be saved from sin then and there, and in Christ's own way. And yet many of them were, so far as one could see, very decent and respectable people. There were then in Jerusalem, we are told, about two millions of people; but among them all there were not so many as two obstacles between them and Christ—there was only one, and that one was, "*Ye would not!*" Some of them were awfully wicked people, but not one of them was shut out by his sins. Christ saves the very worst, if only they are willing to let Him save them.

How shameful and foolish this unwillingness was! It held out against many a sweet entreaty, and many a renewed appeal. "How *often* would I," Christ says. It led them to avoid life eternal as a calamity. Deplorable it must have been when it drew forth from Christ these words and these tears. After all Christ has done and said, the man who lives in a Christian land must do a great deal to get out of Christ's way.

Some of those to whom Christ spoke were full of gaiety, I daresay. The danger, though so near, was not seen by them. At the exhibition I saw a beautiful picture, the name of which was "Adrift." Several little children were on a raft which the wind was carrying away out to the sea. Their faces beamed with joy, and they were dancing, and hurrahing, and waving caps and handkerchiefs. But the faces of their mothers on the pier were white with horror. The mothers knew the danger, the children did not.

"Behold your house is left unto you desolate," Christ says. They had rejected their one hope and remedy, and there was no other Saviour for them. These terrible words were terribly fulfilled, as all the world knows. Light rejected retired behind the gathering cloud of judgment, and darted upon them as lightning. When love had played her part in vain, justice leapt upon the stage. The Romans came, and swept Jerusalem away. Only such a whirlwind, it seems, could scatter such a pestilence. Jerusalem became heaps, so that the Jerusalem of to-day is

built, as the traveller sees, upon some twenty feet of ruins. The people had to eat ashes and human flesh. Their children under seventeen were sold for ninepence each. The burning embers of the city were slaked in pools of blood, and by tens of thousands the survivors were sent to slavery, the mines, and the fights in the amphitheatres. We cannot tell what desolations may come upon the godless in this world or the next, but the bare thought of them should make us turn to Christ as the little fledgling hides itself under the outspread wings of the mother.

From this subject, so dark with judgment, we gladly turn to—

III. *The Willing Saviour.*

Christ, by His words, deeds, and tears, lays close siege to our hearts; He wrestles with man's stiff will, that He may turn his unwillingness into willingness.

Now, let us get to the heart of this grand subject. Are you willing to come to Christ? Are you? If you are, you should know it. It is one of the easiest things in the world for me to know when I am willing to do anything. If you do not wish to yield to Christ, how sad your case is! You would shun as a monster the boy or girl who should treat mother or kind friend as you are treating the willing Saviour.

Dr. Cuyler of New York writes:—

“One cold winter evening I made my first call on

a rich merchant in New York. As I left his door, and the piercing gale swept in, I said, 'What an awful night for the poor!' He went back, and bringing to me a roll of bank-bills, said, 'Please hand these, for me, to the poorest people you know.' After a few days I wrote to him the grateful thanks of the poor whom his bounty had relieved, and added, 'How is it that a man so kind to his fellow-creatures has always been so unkind to his Saviour as to refuse Him his heart?' That sentence touched him to the core. He sent for me to come and talk with him, and speedily gave himself to Christ. He has been a most useful Christian ever since."

But I shall believe that you really wish to be Christ's. Thank God that you are willing, for His Spirit has made you so. You are willing, and Christ is willing; for all unwillingness is with us, and all willingness with Him. That mother-bird never was so willing to gather her chickens under her wings as He is to gather you to His heart, and shield you from every danger. If you are willing to come to Christ, why don't you come at once? Why are you not a Christian? As willing is an act of the soul only, none can hinder you if you really wish to be Christ's. Ask yourself earnestly, What is it that keeps me away from Christ? Dare I say to Him, "O Christ, how often would I, and Thou wouldest not? I have come to Thee; I would never cast Thee out, but I fear that Thou wilt cast me out." What can come in between a willing Saviour and a willing

sinner? Can there be any strife between them? Does there remain the breadth of a straw to separate them? If you, wishing to be Christ's, are still separated from Him, it can be only by some imagination, or by some cloud that is the shadow of your foolish fears. We know that there is no real hindrance on Christ's side; and there can be only one real hindrance on yours, and that is your unwilling mind. Dare you for one moment believe that the weeping Saviour will turn the seeking soul away?

The seeker of Christ sometimes gets bewildered and excited, and so misses the right way. A young man told me that when he examined his difficulties, and brought them alongside of Christ's words, they all melted away like clouds at the shining of the sun.

The aim of the Gospel is to lead the poor trembler at once to Christ. Never forget that the offer of mercy in the Gospel is one of the simplest things in the world. In his story of "The Purloined Letter," Poe tells that the Government detectives in Paris were most anxious to get hold of a letter which a politician had stolen. They searched every nook and corner of the politician's house in vain. All the while the letter they were in search of was lying in a card-rack on the mantelpiece full in view of every visitor. He thoroughly concealed the letter by not concealing it at all. The *unexpected simplicity* of his plan misled the clever detectives. And in some such way the unexpected and perfect simplicity of the

Gospel misleads many of us who expect it to be something very mysterious and out-of-the-way. When you wish to enter the kingdom expect to find an open gate, and you will find it. One very dark night I was visiting a villa for the first time. I found a big iron gate, at which I tugged and pushed in vain. As that was the only gate I could see, and my errand was urgent, I climbed over the wall. When my errand was over, and I was coming down the avenue, I found the light of a lamp falling upon a little side-gate that was standing open. I had not thought of there being two gates, and one of them open. Thus many who seek Christ forget that He has set before them an open gate of salvation.

But after all, your secret thought probably is that while you are willing, Christ is not. I received a most touching letter from a stranger in our neighbourhood. It ran thus:—

“My nephew is dying. He has led a blameless and religious life, but he has many fears, and tells us that he is afraid to die. Our hearts bleed for him. His mother and I have done all we can to remove his fears, but we have failed. It would be a great kindness if you would come and speak to him,” &c.

I went at once. When his mother came into the drawing-room I saw that her face and eyes were full of heart and soul. “Oh, speak as plainly as ever you can to my dear son,” she said as she led me to his bedroom; “he will give you the heartiest welcome.

We have all been praying that God would bless your words to him. We would be content to see him die if his fears were taken away."

I found him in pain, battling hard for breath. I saw that many words would weary him.

"What can I say to him?" I asked myself. Lifting up my heart in silent prayer, I began—

"Do you believe that I would save you on the spot, if I could?"

"Yes," he replied at once, with a look of surprise.

"Is Christ less willing to save you than I am?"

He looked up to the ceiling as if searching for an answer, and then round the walls, and, after a pause, replied, "Well—no."

"This is strange: you are quite sure that I am willing to save you, but you are not so sure that Christ is willing. You said *yes* at once, but your *no* came very slowly. Why is that?"

"Ah, I see now that my doubts are very unreasonable."

"Yes, they are very unreasonable; for Christ came into the world to save sinners: He lived to save; He died to save; He rose again and ascended to heaven to save; He is able to save unto the uttermost; and He has said, 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out!'" By this time he had grown tired. I had a few words of prayer, and left. The next day his mother came to the door when I rang the bell. "Come in," she said cheerily, taking my hand. "Your words were just what my dear

son needed, and God has blessed them to him. He is now calmly trusting in Christ, and his fear of death is gone." I found that his soul was in quietness and confidence, and by-and-by he died in peace. Oh, it is a grand thing to have from your youth up a perfect, living, working faith in the willingness of Christ to save you, and to cleave unto Him as the little bird cleaves to the side of the mother.

"*I* would have gathered you," Christ says: no other protector is needed; He will *do* for you. Thank God that Christ's is the only name whereby we can be saved. It is enough that you be under His mediatorial wings. In Him the Almighty covers you with His feathers. There your soul finds a warm, perfect, and eternal shelter.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat ; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it ; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."—MATT. xxvi. 26-28.

THE Lord's Supper is a grand object-lesson for young and old : a gift to the senses, and an aid to faith. It is the only feast or festival that Christ appointed, and it must therefore teach lessons that we should learn very often.

How simple it all is ! One does not see how it could have been simpler. Three very short verses give us all the words of Christ about it. Yet in Romish and Ritualistic Churches, you find at the Lord's Supper incense, bell ringings, much earthly pomp, processions, comings and goings, dresses of many bright colours, many articles with strange Latin names, and priests turning their backs upon the people. Gavazzi, who was once a Roman Catholic priest, told me that a young priest could scarcely learn how to celebrate mass (that is their name for the Lord's Supper) in less than six weeks ; and yet Matthew uses only sixty-six words in describing it. One wonders where the

Romanists and their sympathisers get their odd ways of observing this holy rite.

We try to keep as closely as possible to Christ's way of observing the Lord's Supper. We use a seemly white cloth to remind us of the table in the upper chamber. When we have given thanks, as Christ did, we break the bread, and give both bread and wine to all the communicants. We do not lay a wafer on the tongue, or keep back the cup from any. Like the Twelve, we do not kneel, but sit, as we receive the bread and wine; and we link on to the sacred rite only prayer, praise, the Word of God, and quiet meditation. We wish to be like the first disciples in spirit as we are like them in our methods. We do with our hands what they did, and we wish to do with our hearts what they did.

A single diamond must have some fifty facets or little faces to bring out its full lustre, and the Lord's Supper, like the diamond, flashes out light on all sides. It brings before our eyes the sum total of our faith, and so—

I. Christ.

Everything here speaks of Him : take Him away, and nothing is left. The bread is the sign of His body; the wine of His blood; and the table is for His disciples; and He has said to us, "This do in remembrance of Me." In many of the churches in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, a very large statue of Christ overshadows the communion table. The eye is thus fixed

not on *it*, but on *Him*: that is as it should be. Christ wishes His people to keep His memory alive till the end of the world, and at the Lord's table we all enter into a sacred conspiracy to do so. We there own that we shall not let His name and redeeming love perish from the minds of men. This is so plain that a little child at once sees it.

The Lord's Supper also sets evidently before our eyes—

II. *Christ Crucified.*

The first Lord's Supper sprang out of the Passover, as the blossom springs out of the bud. The Passover celebrated salvation by the slain Lamb. The bread was broken in token of the breaking of Christ's body by the nails, the spear, and the crown of thorns. The wine poured out is a sensible sign of His shed blood. And we are not left in doubt about the reason why Christ suffered. His death, no doubt, shows us what self-sacrificing love can do: it should soften our hearts and make us ashamed of our selfishness. But that is not its only or its chief end, for Christ says, "This is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins." To remit is the opposite of to retain or keep, and the remission of sins is the putting of them away. Christ's birth, words, deeds, example, and spirit should do us great good; but you notice that He wishes us at His table to fill our minds with His death and the putting away of our sins by it. We are there affectionately to remember Him as

our suffering Saviour, who by His death has done all that was needed for taking away our sins. "The remission of sins" is nearly the same as the forgiveness of our sins. Thus we speak of "the remission of taxes" granted to some pauper widow who pleads her poverty, and the name of another who acts as her advocate and intercessor. In that case the tax-gatherer forgives her the debt. If at the Lord's table the soul does the work of the soul as the body does the work of the body, we there receive afresh the forgiveness of our sins.

The Lord's Supper has often called forth much warm Christian feeling, and has led to surprising revivals of religion. We should expect such good results from it, for it brings us to the very heart of the faith. One feels at the Lord's Supper that the best chosen words of man cannot do justice to the facts we celebrate. How wonderful that all this was done for man!

I was once at a communion which was witnessed by an educated Hindoo. I was told that he had wept from the beginning to the end of the service. In conversation with him afterwards he gave me the reason for his emotion. In the church he was busy comparing our religion with the religions of India. He was thinking how hard and cruel they were, without heart and without pity; how they taught men to torture themselves horribly, to crush themselves under the great wheels of their idol-cars, and burn their widows alive. As he placed all that alongside of the dying love of Christ, he could not help weeping many tears.

The sight of the Lord's Supper has often greatly moved the heart of a child. I was reading lately that John Brown of Haddington, when a boy of eight, was allured to Christ by witnessing the communion.

The Lord's Supper also reminds us that—

III. *Christ is the Bread of Life.*

Communicants meet not around a tomb, but around a table—not at a fast, but at a glad feast. It is a place not of gloom, but of attraction. They are God's guests, if we dare say so, and they receive heavenly hospitality. The bread and wine are signs of the food and drink of the heart. The communicant is a hungerer and thirster, who finds in Christ's redeeming love all that his soul craves. Paul calls the cup in the Lord's Supper "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor. x. 16). It is the symbol of spiritual enjoyment. But it must be received in the right way. He that means to take food must use his mouth; he that means to take air must use not his fingers but his nostrils. So we feed on Christ by faith; for the soul, like the body, cannot live without its proper food and drink. By faith we are to rise from the sign to the thing signified, and so we shall eat His flesh and drink His blood. That is a strong—a staggering phrase—for making Christ our own, and getting from Him all the good He can give us. Make it very clear to yourself that the Lord's Supper is a beautiful emblem of that great and most real feast which Christ has provided for every humble and trustful heart. You should hang all the glory

of the Gospel around this simple rite. When you come to the Lord's table, I hope you will come in a glad and grateful spirit. If Christ gave thanks under the awful shadow of Gethsemane and Calvary, we will surely give thanks as we obey His dying command. And as you prepare even for a feast in your own house, you will surely seek preparation for the holy communion.

At the Lord's table we are also reminded that—

IV. *Christ is our Master.*

All Christ's disciples, old and young, should feel the pathos of His dying command. Paul says, "The Lord Jesus, *the same night* in which He was betrayed, took bread" (1 Cor. xi. 23). I have known wicked men who felt bound all their lives by the deathbed request of a father or mother. They respected that request because it was made on *the same night* on which the father or mother died. And Christ's command to keep Him in memory should appeal very powerfully to every Christian heart. At every communion Christ presides, and all who partake profess to be His disciples. The bread and wine are the signs and seals of the new covenant. A covenant is a promise with some very valuable additions, or a very deliberate and solemn agreement. It binds two. In the covenant of grace God binds Himself by His word and oath, and the disciple gladly binds himself to all the terms and duties set forth. Covenants usually have their signs and seals.

Mere signs are sometimes very useful. I was tra-

velling lately on a railway with a single line of rails. I noticed that the engine-driver was not allowed to start till he had received not only permission, but also a sign of it. The station master gave him what, I think, they call "a tablet." It was a large circle of brass with a big handle. It was a sign of the word of permission, and it seemed to me that it had purposely been made solid and bulky that it might the better serve all the purposes of a sign. Thus the Lord's Supper is a sign of the covenant of grace, and a sign so big as to fill the mind and eye; but it is more than a sign: it is also a seal. When our Queen publishes a law or an order, she does not think it enough to give her signature, that is, the sign of her handwriting. She marks it with "the great seal," and that gives dignity and binding force to the document. In the East to-day a letter or signature is not regarded as genuine unless it bears the writer's seal. I saw a petition in the Lebanon bearing some signatures with the seals, and some without them, and I was told that every one who had added his seal to his signature felt himself completely bound, while those who had given only their signature would not scruple to break their written promise. When a Turk receives a letter with the Vizier's seal, he places it at a respectful distance and bows before it. Our children often exchange keepsakes and love-tokens, and agree to regard them as proofs and pledges of youthful friendship.

Marriage, for example, is a covenant of love for life, and the marriage ring is its sign and seal. There was

lately exhibited in London a gold sardonyx ring with a cameo showing a portrait of Queen Elizabeth. It was the identical ring given by her to her unfortunate favourite, the Earl of Essex. She once promised to be his lifelong protector. She magnified the promise into a covenant, and of that covenant she gave him a sacred pledge. She told him that if ever he sent her that ring, she would stand by him to the last. When doomed to die, he sent the ring by the treacherous Countess of Nottingham, but she never delivered it. The Earl thus lost his life, and Elizabeth's latter days were darkened.

When a communicant enters into all the spiritual meanings of the Lord's Supper, he discovers in the bread and wine the sacred pledges of Christ's love to him, and of his devotion to Christ, and he vows by God's grace to live in all Christian loyalty and honour. He once more accepts the livery and badge of true discipleship: he hears Christ saying to him—

“All Mine was thine,
All thine should be Mine.”

Once more, the Lord's Supper reveals—

V. Christ as the Bond of Brotherhood.

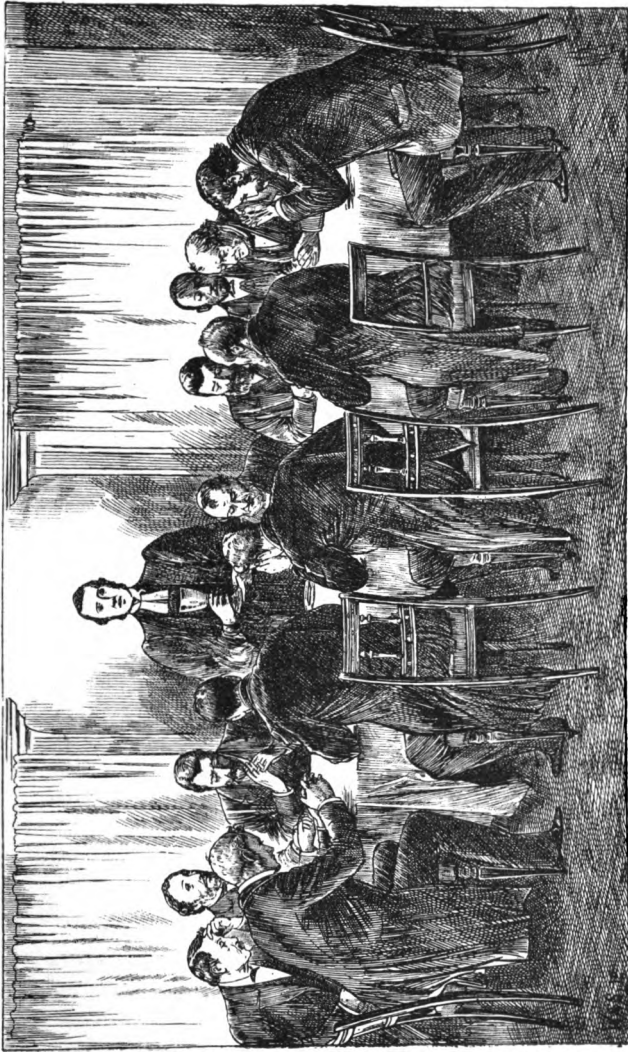
Christ does not keep different tables for black and white, gentle and simple, learned and unlearned. All drink of the same cup, eat of the same loaf, name the same sacred name, and have the same everything.

The Lord's Supper was celebrated when the Evangelical Alliance met in Berlin. (See the picture on

the opposite page.) Men of all climes, colours, and churches were present. The sacramental wine was in crystal cups, tinged with yellow. The presiding minister held the cup before him, and said finely, "Through this I see you all of one colour."

I have read that the Duke of Wellington was once kneeling in church, about to receive the communion. One of his old soldiers came and knelt by his side. When he saw that his neighbour was the great general, he rose to go away. "Don't go away," said Wellington, "you and I meet here on the same level."

At every communion I feel that we make far too little of the sacred brotherhood of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ. Scholars at the same school, natives of the same parish, students at the same university, soldiers in the same regiment, sailors on the same ship, fellows in the same amusements—all these feel that many interesting ties bind them together; but how poor are all these compared with the sacred ties of which the Lord's Supper reminds us. *Love* must have been the perfect tense of *live*, one has said, as *strove* is the perfect of *strive*. In the grammar of the New Testament, at least, *love* is the perfect of *live*; for he lives most who loves best. Thus brotherly love is the keynote of our Saviour's great communion addresses in the five chapters of the Gospel of John, beginning with the thirteenth. Remember that *graces* grow not like *grass* in the meadows, but like *corn* in fields carefully ploughed and sown. Cultivate, then, the grace of brotherly love, the queen of all the graces.



CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER BY EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE AT BERLIN.

In the Lord's Supper we find— .

VI. *A Type of Heaven.*

We are to show the Lord's death "till He come," for "He shall come the second time without sin unto salvation." The Lord's Supper bids us look forwards. It reminds us of the marriage supper of the Lamb, and of the eating of the new bread of life in heaven. Communion on earth is a faint image of the communion above. That feast has no "bitter herbs," nor Judas, nor end. To that great feast you are invited, and you may be there if you choose. Accept the invitation at once, and never beg off from it.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CROSS.

"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."—GAL. vi. 14. Read also the story of the Crucifixion in the Gospels.

THE cross is by far the most common object in Roman Catholic countries. In some Alpine valleys the traveller finds a cross or crucifix (that is, a cross with the image of Christ on it) on every cottage, at every parting of the ways, and on nearly every notable height. Sometimes a church or chapel blocks up the path, and again the cross confronts him. The byre and hay-shed stand under the shelter of the cross; and as he pushes on he recognises the top of the pass by the crucifix crowning it.

In the Holy Land you are disgusted with the stories told you there about the cross. I visited a Greek convent a little way to the south-west of Jerusalem. The monks there take you down to a rock in the cellar, and gravely show you the very spot where the tree grew which was *compelled* to furnish the wood for Christ's cross. They show you the marks of its roots in the solid rock. The popular idea used to be, and in some places still is, that the

aspen-tree shivers mystically in sympathy with that mother-tree in Palestine. Again, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre you are shown the place where, 300 years after Christ's death, and in spite of all the burnings and desolations Jerusalem had endured, St. Helena discovered the true cross; and you are told all about "The invention of the cross," as it is called. It was no doubt "a pure invention:" the title seems to be a sarcasm. I have read that at the Reformation there were shiploads of wood that was declared to belong to the very cross on which our Saviour died. The wood of the cross, if we had it, could do us no more good than any other log of wood. Paul certainly did not glory in the wood of the cross.

Nor did he glory in the sign of the cross. There are millions of people who use the cross as an amulet, spell, or charm. A physician told me that he once removed a cross from the breast of a sick lady he was examining, and in the utmost alarm she implored him to restore it at once. She could not feel safe unless that bit of metal touched her skin. It is the soul, and not the skin, that needs the healing virtue of Christ.

For many reasons we do not use the sign of the cross as the Roman Catholics do. The cross is one of the most ancient of religious emblems, for it is found on Phœnician monuments that are more than 3000 years old; but it did not come into use as an emblem of Christianity till after 300 A.D.¹ Anti-

¹ Harper's "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," p. 130.

quaries have not discovered one cross in any of the Christian monuments before that date. The emblems of the early Church were the fish, the anchor, the ship, the dove, the palm-branch, and the Good Shepherd. While we thus make little of the outward sign, we wish to get at the very heart of the cross, at the Divine truth and doctrine of this sacred object-lesson.

One of the great painters was asked how he had put so much devout feeling into his picture of the Crucifixion. "Ah," he replied, "I painted it on my knees." On the knees of our hearts let us now study the cross of Christ. God grant that our study of it may incline us to say heartily with Paul, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I wish now to rehearse some of the great truths we should learn under the shadow of the cross. The first is—

I. The Greatness of Man.

I once spent my holidays at the coast near a sunken vessel. For many a day men were toiling to recover the vessel and her cargo. When she was raised she would be towed into harbour, and hundreds of pounds would be spent upon repairing her. Her owners were determined that their vessel should not become an utter wreck. The toil and expense lavished upon that ship declared her value.

Why this cross? why Christ's death upon it? It

all was for us men, and for our salvation. Was man worth all this? we ask. Our wonder grows when we remember all that is connected with the death of Christ. By itself it does not show us all He has done for man. We must remember His lowly birth, and all the parts of His sorrowful life; we must follow Him from the cradle to the cross. And then we must think upon what came after the cross: His burial, His resurrection, and His rising to heaven, where He completes the work He began on earth. You must not forget that He did all this for man without grudging: He was glad to do it; for He describes His work for us in these ancient words, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart." Death did not surprise or overtake Christ; He deliberately went forward to meet it. He loved to the death: He died of loving (Ps. xl. 8). * When He knew that His end was near, "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 51). These words declare His determination not to be turned aside by any obstacles whatsoever. When the shadow of Gethsemane and Calvary were over His soul, "He took the cup *and* gave thanks." And all this for the sake of man! It staggers us; we can scarcely take it in.

The trouble taken to save the wrecked vessel gave me some idea of its value, and thus the efforts made to save fallen man show me what value God puts upon him in spite of all the havoc sin has wrought in him. Surely one of the voices from the cross

to us is, "Honour all men." Most wonderfully God teaches us to honour all men, women, and children, no matter what their colour may be, or their poverty, or their rudeness, or their evil behaviour. The cross should prove to us that man has an excellency beyond that of the sun and of all the created things on which the sun shines. It should teach us not to speak of rich people as the better classes. At the most they are only better off, and sometimes not even that. We have not drunk in the spirit of the cross if we speak of the poor as "the lower classes." Thousands of them belong to the very highest class in the land. There are no such differences among men as among porcelain and delfware vessels. God has made of one blood and of one stuff all the sons and daughters of human kind, and Christ has conferred an incomparable honour upon every one who wears human nature. Learn from Him to reverence the crown-rights of man, and to take heed lest ye despise the smallest ones in the human family.

As the man Christ Jesus rises before you, say humbly and thankfully, "I also am a man."

The cross of Christ is a new and an astounding revelation of the value of man as man. When you grow older you will find that humanity is the keynote of our age. You may then read beautiful books in prose and verse—and I hope you will be a lover of good books—in which the writers say many eloquent things about the dignity of man. Some of them are foolish enough to speak as if this were a discovery

of our age. All the things ever said or done in honour of man grow pale before the life and cross of the Man Christ Jesus. He is the source of all the best humanity in the world to-day.

The cross also proves to us—

II. *The Greatness of Sin.*

The head soon grows dizzy when one gazes upon this strange sight, and tries to reach the bottom of all its mysteries. Many things about it are known to God only, who gave His only-begotten Son to die for us. It will do us no good to exercise ourselves in great matters, or in things too high for us. But some things about the cross are plain as day. It is very plain that Christ was sinless, and yet He was the greatest sufferer the world has seen. And we are told very plainly that He died not only for us, but “for our sins.” “He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.” If sin brought all this suffering upon the sinless Christ, what a hateful thing it must be. How terrible it must be for any sinful man to bear the whole burden of his own sins! My words are not likely to help you to understand this lesson, but I am sure that you will deeply feel it if you think much about Christ’s sufferings for our sins. He who sits in imagination at the foot of the cross will be sure to discover the sinfulness of sin, and pray God that he may hate it till his dying day.

You may easily think lightly of the evil of sin. A thousand influences tend to weaken your sense of it. But your own conscience, if you will listen to it, will

save you from that great error. Conscience is very strong and tender in a child, and makes even small sins very bitter. Is it not true that the most of your miseries have come from your sins? I do not mean such sorrows as come to the liar and the thief when he is found out and soundly punished, but I mean those strange, inner miseries you have when you do wrong, those stings of accusing conscience which are known to yourself only. Have you not already suffered many things on account of sin? That boy, that girl, is happy who has not laid up a stock of self-reproaches on account of the sins of youth. As you read books, you will find many facts that suggest to you very solemn views of sin. I know there are many wicked and frivolous books that laugh at fashionable sins, and even praise them; but many poets, and even many novelists, by fearful examples teach you the danger of scorning any of God's laws. Your knowledge of life, as you grow older, will print the same lessons deeply on your heart. But under Christ's cross you will learn more than you can learn in all other places concerning the greatness of sin.

The cross is meant to reveal to us—

III. *The Greatness of Salvation.*

For it shows us that nothing has been wanting on Christ's part. He did not spare Himself, but freely gave Himself for us. What more could He have done? He knew all that was needed for our salvation, and He declared, "It is finished." By that *it* He meant His work for us.

No one can suggest anything that could have made Christ's salvation greater than it really is. We could not have had a greater Saviour; we could not have had greater wisdom, love, and power. All here is great with infinite greatness, and the preacher is apt to wrong this theme by any words that he can use.

I wish to show you how you should use this truth. You should say to yourself, "I am very weak and sinful. I am all wrong, and I need God to put me right and keep me right. I know little about my sin, and about what is needed for my salvation; but I am quite sure that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour. His cross tells me the greatness of His salvation. Christ bids me come to Him, and offers to save me. I come as I am, and take His simple word. I cannot understand the dark things around my sin and His cross; but I know that He will not cast me out, and that is enough for me. Jesus, Thou Son of God, have mercy on me. Oh, Thou Saviour of sinners, I now wholly give myself to Thee; and by Thy grace I will serve Thee while life lasts."

When you stand under the cross you should have no fears about Christ's welcome. If He were not willing to save you, why did He hang on that tree? When He has done so much, and with so much pain, will He not save you, when your salvation can give Him nothing but joy? The cross should shame us out of all our withering suspicions of Him.

The cross is God's best and last means of melting

hard hearts and winning sinful men. If it fails, we cannot hope that any other weapons will succeed.

This subject also instructs us in—

IV. *The Service of Christ.*

1. It shows us the *reasonableness* of it. If He did all this for us, we surely will wish to make some return to Him. "We love Him," says the beloved disciple, "because He first loved us." This is the explanation of all true Christian service. Grateful love, kindled by Christ's redeeming love, grows mighty in the Christian heart, and conquers the love of sin and self, and flows forth in all the deeds of holy living. He must be a monster, worse than a wild beast, who is incapable of gratitude. You know the beautiful story of the lion from whose swollen paw Androcles drew forth the festering thorn. That same lion—whetted with hunger—was afterwards sent into the circus to devour that same Androcles. The noble beast recognised his former forest friend, and licked his hand in gratitude. It is gratitude that has made all the great Christians. Without it religious service is no better than a mill-horse round. Nothing can be more reasonable than this grateful love; and all your reasons for it are before your mind when you survey the cross.

2. The cross also shows us the *spirit of true service*; for every Christian wishes to be as a little Christ. Christ consented to serve even on the cross. We should make His consent the model of ours. And we should have the spirit of the cross in renouncing

sin and self, the spirit of self-sacrificing love. In many passages we are taught that we are to die with Christ on the cross, and like Him. By our union to Him we are to have that death to sin, and self-crucifixion, without which we can never become real Christians. These great thoughts should underlie all our small duties. I have heard of an old Scottish chief, who was asked to join the party of those who had slain his king, and who replied, "I can never be on your side; a river of blood flows between you and me; you have slain my king." If the Christian entered thoroughly into the meaning of Christ's cross, he would feel that a river of sacred blood flows between him and the sin that slew his Lord.

3. Christ on the cross teaches us how to die. His last words were, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." He then bowed His head, and gave up the ghost. He breathed the spirit of a childlike submission to the will of God. Some young people have a perfect horror of death. The bare mention of it spoils all their joys. The cross should drive away this unhappy fear. He who knows Christ should rise above the fear of death. Strive to live like Christ, and you may put away your wondering thoughts about your own death. If every day you commend your spirit into your Father's hands, as you should, you will have no untried thing to do when the signal is given for your quitting life. They die best who live best, and they live best who live most in the faith and spirit of the cross of Christ.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS.

LUKE xxiii. 39-43.

SOME are pained to hear this man called a thief. They maintain that he must have been a noble patriot who had rebelled against the Romans. Had he succeeded he might have had a place, they think, among the world's heroes, alongside of Judas Macabæus, William Tell, William Wallace, or Garibaldi. They cannot believe that an ordinary criminal could have shown such greatness of mind. It is very wonderful that he understood Christ better, so far as we know, than any man living then did. I say *man*, for probably the faithful women around the cross had a true insight into Christ's character. When His own disciples misunderstood and forsook Him, when the people were mocking, this man was the one discoverer of Christ. In the sufferer nailed to the cross he saw the Messiah, and honoured Him as the hearer of prayer, the Saviour of the chief of sinners, and the opener of the gates of paradise: he hoped that Christ would remember him in heaven, while all he knew on earth would be glad to forget him; he expected Christ to live as king in heaven, and himself to live with Him. Yet we

must, I think, still call him the thief on the cross. For he is called a malefactor or evil-doer (ver. 39); he does not claim to be better than his cross-fellow; both Barabbas and he are called by a name that means robber or brigand; and he owns that he deserved to die for his crimes (ver. 41). Of course, he might be an evil-doer without being a thief, but his confession suggests that he was worse than a thief. I may suppose that, like Timothy, he had had a godly mother who had prayerfully and lovingly taught him in his childhood the Holy Scriptures. Her one hope was the coming Messiah; for, like Simeon and Anna, she believed that the dayspring from on high was about to visit Israel. He might share his mother's hope that the Messiah would soon appear. As the land had been ringing for three years with Christ's fame, he might have had for some time a dim notion that He was the Messiah. As a prisoner he would be in Jerusalem during the whole of the Passion-week, and was probably familiar with its leading events. Perhaps he was present at Christ's trial, and it might have impressed him as it impressed Pontius Pilate. He was Christ's companion on the way to Calvary and on the cross; he learnt much from the events of that day. He thus knew all about paradise and the Messiah. A true love of his country might first move him to break the hated laws of the Romans; in those wild days one step might lead him on to another, till he found himself an outcast, living by robbery. In some scuffle he might become a murderer. Having some nobleness of

nature, and a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, his utter failure in life and the quiet of the prison deeply moved him. His heart was melted, and in imagination he was again in the pious home of his youth, and more than ever under its hallowed influences. Pain and the shadow of death wonderfully enlarged his mind and roused his conscience. A dying man sits close to reality. Some people in such a case have in a single hour the experiences of years. He was all the more likely to pass then through such a crisis, as he had great vigour of mind and a keen instinct for the heart of things. Even uneducated men have often on the scaffold made speeches of surpassing eloquence. He watched the strange sufferer by his side, pondered His words, and read the superscription on the cross.

Piecing all these things together, and recalling his previous knowledge of Christ, which might have been considerable, there at once flashed into his mind the conviction that this Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised to his fathers. He would keenly feel the contrast between the holiness of Jesus and his own crimes. Perhaps Christ's prayer for His murderers made him perfectly sure that Christ was willing to pardon him. The blasphemies of his comrade roused in him a deep disgust, which inclined him all the more to make his frank confession, and throw himself upon the pardoning mercy of Christ. His mind was like a lamp well oiled and trimmed, and now it was lighted by a single touch: the moment he applied his Bible

knowledge to Christ, all the dark things around became plain to him.

Believing this to be the true explanation, we shall gaze upon him as a great sinner saved by grace, and ask what he teaches us about the great salvation. From him we learn that—

- I. Salvation is full.
- II. Salvation is free.
- III. Salvation is present.
- IV. Salvation is for the very worst.
- V. Salvation must be sought and received.

I. Salvation is full.

For Christ does not half save, or merely lend a helping hand, or give a fresh start, or put the wanderer on the right road and wish him safely home, or, if we may speak thus, provide so many shillings in the pound to help us pay our spiritual debts. The dying thief was to be that very day in paradise. He was promised far more than he had ventured to ask; and there is no hint that heaven would be smaller to him than to others. As no defiling thing can enter it, we are sure that all his sins were cleansed away.

If any one ever needed the purifying flames of purgatory, surely this malefactor did. One greatly wonders how any one, with this beautiful story before him, can find any room for the fiction of purgatory. The dying thief was saved by Jesus only; plainly no hand but

His was in the work. For many long months the engineers had been working at the two ends of the Forth Bridge. One day they met in the centre on equal terms, shook hands, and hurrahed. Some people seem to think that, in bridging the chasm between God and man, God works from above and man from below, till the two meet and finish the work between them. Never let such a thought darken your mind. A true illustration of the fate of the man, who by working hopes to gain salvation, is furnished by the explorers who wished to find or force a north-west passage. Mountains of rock and ice filled, so far as their eye could reach, all the space between earth and heaven. Professor Monier Williams tells us that salvation by works is the keynote of all the sacred books of the Eastern world. Thank God that you know another gospel. Despair of salvation by works. I have just read that one of the great Christian writers of the day was brought to decision for Christ by hearing read in a church these words, with a pause between each clause: "By grace are ye saved—through faith;—and that not of yourselves;—it is the gift of God." That verse so read showed him the Gospel way of salvation. Salvation also is full, as it is enough for all. I have read that a poor Manchester woman, when taken to the seaside, expressed her delight on seeing for the first time something of which there was enough for everybody. The fulness of salvation is like the fulness of the ocean.

It is also plain that—

II. *Salvation is free.*

This man could not purchase it by his virtues, for he had none; nor by his good works, for his hands were now nailed to the cross. And no man was able to purchase it for him. "Can I do anything for you?" a minister asked a dying youth in a hospital, who replied, "Oh, sir, can you undo?" A free salvation was the only salvation for him. You see at a single glance that the prodigal son was in the very same plight. The Bible is at great pains to make the perfect freeness of salvation exceedingly plain to the humblest minds. Our object-lesson, being by the side of Christ on the cross, advertises this delightful truth to all men. God is a King; He gives, but will not sell. And He gives like a great King, with royal generosity. What price could one reckon equal to such a boon as salvation? I have read that Zeuxis gave his paintings as gifts to the cities of Greece, for he said that money could not buy them. We are to buy without money and without price. That strong double phrase shows the perfect freeness of the thing we buy. When you buy you consent to take an article for so much money; your consent is the very heart of your buying. When you receive salvation you consent to its terms, which are without money or price. The Gospel offers gifts, glorious and free. In the Gospel God says, "I give;" and the heart replies, "I accept." The hand of faith grasps the gift God's hand holds out, for faith is a receiving grace. What can be freer than the summer's sunshine, which you let in by only opening the window

or the eyes? As free is God's grace, and your receiving of it gives God joy. Who, then, would refuse this free gift?

The thief on the cross declares to all that—

III. *Salvation is present.*

Some think of salvation as the apprentice boy thinks of the fortune he is to win some day. After years of toiling and slow gains he hopes to find himself a millionaire. Many seem never to think that salvation may be theirs here and now. It lies before them in the far-off hazy distance—in heaven, or somewhere about the end of a long and painful life. Salvation on earth, no doubt, is a slender thing compared with what it will be by-and-by; but most surely God means us to have it now. The life Christ gives is for this world, and it is for the young in their earliest days. You may have a very large part of this life in your hearts now.

Great is the folly of those who delay salvation. My life as a minister has made me very doubtful about deathbed repentance. I have no doubt that it is real in some cases, but time has proved it to be in many a short-lived delusion. Often have I heard wicked people, afraid of death, saying with their whole heart, as it seemed, everything one could wish them to say; and when the fear of death had passed away they were worse than they ever had been. How can any one know that on his deathbed he will have any heart to repent? Pain and approaching death do not always bring men nearer Christ, for the other thief on the cross spent his latest

breath in blasphemies. Never set a limit to God's pardoning mercy—believe that he who truly seeks it in life's last hours will find it. A great sinner may be saved between the saddle and the ground, or between the lightning and the thunder of death, as one puts it. But why should any one delay? A deathbed repentance may be languid and sick, like the dying body or the diseased and disabled faculties. This dying thief seized his first chance, so far as we know. "Some crowd repentance," says an old writer, "into so narrow a room that it dies for want of air to breathe in." I heard an old man tell that before gas was brought into our city, he one evening in a weaving mill asked a girl why she was in such a hurry. Pointing to a little candle and then to her loom, she replied, "I am afraid that my candle-end will be done before my work." She had wisdom.

I often point to the dying thief when I wish to prove that—

IV. *Salvation is for the worst.*

He was counted one of the very worst both by himself and his fellows; for they would not suffer him to live, and he owned that he deserved to die. He was then on the narrow boundary line between the two worlds, and the outcast of both. He is not held up as a surprising instance of God's grace, which we are not to expect to see repeated. He is rather, like the Apostle Paul, a pattern or sample to all mankind of what God's grace can do. Many desponding souls, who dared not

hope for the grace given to Peter or Paul, have ventured to ask such grace as was given to the dying thief.

It should give us joy to know that the very worst is well worth saving, and may be saved.

“A sinner is a sacred thing ;
The Holy Ghost has made him so.”

But never imagine that the worst have somehow a preference, and that you would have a better chance if you had been a wild sinner. Oh no! Christ wishes to give boundless encouragement in the Gospel, and therefore, both by precept and example, He shows us that salvation is for the chief of sinners. Sometimes those who have not been outwardly wicked count themselves among the very worst. In his “Life” it is told that Dr. Guthrie was overheard saying on his deathbed, “A brand plucked from the burning.” “But how can I be clean inside of me?” asked a boy whose mother had said that he was very good.

The truth is that the Gospel is for all, and it uses ever so many means to get a hold of all sorts of people. A minister I knew was once speaking to a sailor who was not sure that Christ would save him. “Suppose,” the minister said, “it had been written in the Bible that Jesus Christ came into the world to save *sailors*, would you not have been sure that it was for you?” “I would,” replied the sailor. “Well, it is written that He came into the world to save *sinners*. Is it not as certain that you are a sinner as that you are a sailor?” To another man who had the same difficulty

he quoted the verse, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "Yes," said the inquirer; "but these words were spoken to Jews." "Well," replied the minister, "there is another passage which says, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to *every creature*.'" "Ah," said the man, with a smile, "you have me now. I cannot deny but I am a creature."

How bright and good the Gospel is! They only know thoroughly the gladness of the Gospel who have compared it with the words of other teachers. The belief of the heathen world, ancient and modern, is that "in this universe nothing can be forgiven." The splendour of the Gospel grows upon us as we study it, just as the stars multiply while we gaze upon them. How noteworthy that, amid all the agonies of His cross, Christ besought forgiveness for His murderers, and bestowed it upon the dying thief. When Judson the missionary returned from Burmah to his native town, many came to hear him. He began his address with these words, "I know you want me to tell you the best thing I can. I have seen many wonderful places and wonderful things, but I have found nothing so wonderful as this, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.'"

Just before his death, when probably fresh light from above was streaming through the opening door upon his soul, Robertson of Irvine said in deep tones, "I think I could preach a sermon yet, and this would be

the text, 'He is able to save unto the uttermost.'" The dying thief is Christ's object-sermon upon that text. He is also a fine illustration of the humility which becomes all Christians, especially those who have been rescued from a wild life. Andrew Fuller says, "The boasting language so common amongst convicts who profess to repent and believe the Gospel, in our times, has caused some to ask whether the gallows was not the surest way to heaven." The last testimony of this convict contains no boastful word. He also teaches us that—

V. Salvation must be sought and received.

The blaspheming thief was very near the Saviour, and saw his comrade saved, yet all was lost upon him. The gate of paradise was opened at his side, but he would not enter. Some Gospel-hearers are like the waterfowls swimming in the lake with feathers unwet. Two street scenes touched me the other day. I saw a poor blind man reading the Scriptures, while the gay holiday crowds hurried past him to the steamers. To me he was a picture of many a preacher; his voice is little more than a sound, his message is unheeded. Again I slackened my step opposite a poor street artist, who was chalking beautiful pictures upon the pavement. "Ah," thought I, "these bright pictures will soon be dashed with rain, covered with dust, and trampled under foot of man and beast. Faint and fainter will they grow, and soon they will be but a blot upon the flagstones." And then I thought that the

impressions made by street painter and preacher often fare alike—the busy world easily wipes out both. But I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak. You will not be behind the dying thief. You will frankly confess your sins as he confessed his. You will seek as he sought, and such seeking is finding; for the Father runs to meet the returning prodigal, and kisses smother the half of his sad story. You will not doubt where he believed; and you also will give all honour to Christ, the Forgiver, and the Lord of Paradise.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EMPTY GRAVE.

"He is not here : for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."—*MATT.* xxviii. 6.

A FRIEND in Jerusalem offered to show me one of the most interesting sights, as he thought, in the Holy Land. He took me to a garden which a friend of his had bought. It lay a little to the north of Calvary. The green grass there, it was found, covered the ruins of former ages, and a large rock-hewn sepulchre had recently been laid bare. When we arrived at it my friend said, "Now this may have been the very tomb in which Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus laid the body of our Lord. It at least belongs to the time of Christ ; its owner must have been a rich man like Joseph ; and it is nigh at hand unto Calvary." Few objects have ever waked in me so eager an interest, and it helped me to understand every statement in the Gospels about the tomb of our Lord, with the one exception of the stone rolled to the door. As we entered the sepulchre, we had to stoop down as John and Mary Magdalene did (*John* xx. 5, 11). The door was only some three or four feet high. We found ourselves in a room "that was hewn in stone"

(Luke xxiii. 53). It was large enough to hold some twenty people (Luke xxiv. 3). It had resting-places for dead bodies, like the shelves of a press, or the berths of a ship. Some of these faced the door, so that the buried body could be seen from it, and one could easily sit at the head and another at the feet of the dead body (John xx. 12).

Not far from that garden we found "The Tomb of the Kings," as it is called. A stone, like a millstone, stood near the door. A sloping groove or trench had been cut for it in the rock. The Talmud calls that stone a "roller;" for it was rolled in front of the door, and so closed it (Matt. xxvii. 60). It was easy to roll it down hill and so shut the door; but any one wishing to enter would naturally say with the women, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" (Mark xvi. 3). The stone we saw "was very great," and it was about the right height and breadth for a comfortable seat (Matt. xxviii. 2). It was upon such a stone that the angel sat; for the measure of an angel is the same as the measure of a man (Rev. xxi. 17).

During the Middle Ages, millions of Crusaders started for Palestine that they might rescue the holy sepulchre from the Turks. Their spirit was, "Come, let us worship the place where our Lord lay, and fight, and die for it." To-day thousands of poor pilgrims from the heart of Russia visit the imagined sepulchre of Christ, and burn candles at its shrine. All the people in a parish collect money to send one as their

representative, and they believe that they will all share the merit and holiness of the pilgrimage. Some of these pilgrims come all the way from Siberia, and spend two or three years in the journey. Their zeal shames us. We can be pilgrims in spirit, and journey together to Christ's sepulchre. The dust and stones of it, if we could see them, could not make us any better, but its teachings should do us good. Let us approach it in the spirit of Joseph and Nicodemus, who, on the day of Christ's funeral, did *bold* things for Christ, and *beautiful* things, and *new* things, and *great* things, for they courageously gave Him a new tomb, and "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about *an hundred pound weight*."

There is no vacant place in the universe so suggestive as the empty grave of Jesus: it is a perfect mine of consolation; for it gives the assurance of—

I. Salvation.

II. Victory.

III. Heaven.

I. *Salvation.*

Paul tells us that if Christ had not risen, our faith should have been vain, and we should have remained in our sins. His death seemed the end and total failure of His work. But His empty grave interprets for us the darkness of His Cross. His resurrection proves to the whole world that He has done all He undertook for us. The empty grave re-echoes the

words from the Cross, "It is finished." Then the risen Christ was both like and unlike His former self. He was unlike, for He had the bearing of one whose work was done with success: He moved with freer step, and was no longer as "the Man of Sorrows." And He was like His former self. He was as ready as ever to save and comfort; He had the very same patience with His erring disciples. You remember how beautifully He instructed the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and how He cured Thomas of His doubts by letting him put his fingers into His wounds. He had the same care for all the wants of His disciples; for at the Sea of Tiberias He asked them, "Children, have ye any meat?" and He provided a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread. He had the same spirit that multiplied the loaves, and could not endure to send the people away fasting. You know, too, how He gave Peter a full feeling of pardon by bidding him feed His sheep and His lambs. We have thus plenty of proofs that the heart of the risen Christ is the very same to His disciples as it was in the days of His flesh. Death made no break in His work, for "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. vii. 25). Two great facts were like the two lobes in the heart of the Gospel of the early Church: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," and "He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4).

Christ's empty tomb is the token of—

II. *Victory.*

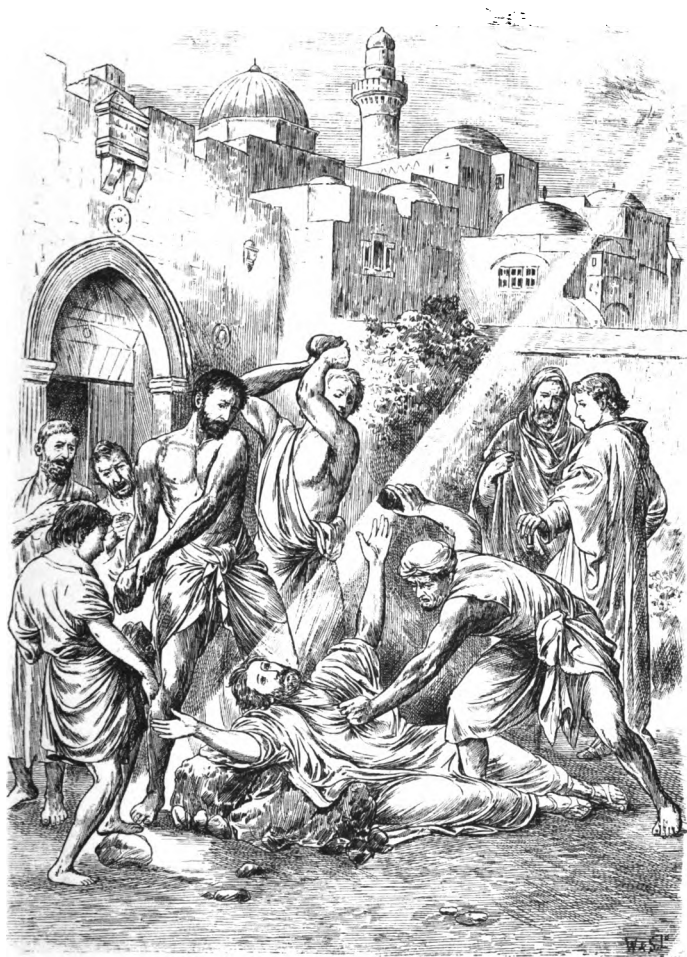
I visit a home where the body of a youth awaits burial. His chair is empty; his musical voice is silent; his brain can work no more; his education seems all in vain; his many prize-books on the table seem the cruel mockery of all our hopes. The very small part of God's plan for him that we can see greatly perplexes us. We cannot even see his body, for the doctor will not allow us to breathe the atmosphere of the room in which his coffin lies. Those who love him best are fain to hide his dear form from their eyes. Death has spared nothing, and his victory seems complete. If death ended all, how desolate earth and human life should seem! But my spirit takes a walk in Joseph's garden, and with Mary Magdalene I stoop down and gaze into the tomb. The stone is rolled away, and in the light of the Gospels I see all within. The grave is empty—ours is not a dead Jewish Christ—and shining ones sit by. I see "the linen clothes lying," and "the napkin that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself" (John xx. 5, 7). He hath triumphed, and triumphed with greatest ease. No sign of hurry or confusion can I detect. The Risen One has attended even to the details of tidiness and beautiful arrangement; the linen clothes are not in a confused heap, for the napkin is carefully disposed. This is a sure token of perfect calmness, and of a heart and hand at

leisure. These fine little touches are eloquent of the thoroughness of Christ's victory. And so I, a perishing man among the perishing, praise God that sin and sickness, sorrow and death, are not to have all their own way on earth. By the side of the coffin and at the mouth of the grave I can use these very bold words, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" I can say, "Christ hath *abolished* death." He has done far more than wounded or checked it, or promised to conquer it at last. This empty grave, with its angels and well-wrapped napkin, tells me that death itself shall die.

Now Christ's victory was not for His solitary self, but for all His faithful people. He died for us only, but He rose for Himself and us. The grave was to Him an avenue into life. Ah, we sometimes feel that death hangs over us as the avalanche hangs over an Alpine village. A word, a breath of air, may set it agoing, and then we shall be swept away. Every garden has its grave. The earth is rinded and coloured with the dust of the dead. But that empty grave in Joseph's garden speaks of other empty graves, and Christ's victory is ours if we are His. All this should help you to conquer that horror of death which casts its chilling shadow over many a young heart. Why should your fancy dwell gloomily upon the death-bed and its strange possibilities, the weakness, the pain, the tyranny and cruelty of the last enemy, the horrid black coffin, the yawning deep grave? Your faith in Christ should overleap all these dark things, and land you amid the

revealed blessedness of heaven. Why should we shudder at the thought of death as the bird shudders when the hawk is hovering over it? The disciples found the grave empty and angels around it, and we should find them there too, though our tears and fears often hinder us from doing so. Let not a fearful fancy overcome your faith, "for fear is more pain than is the pain it fears." Let not your imagination erect over the grave a tombstone with a grinning death's-head and cross-bones. Be like that Christian who, seeing a painter painting death as a skeleton with a scythe, advised him to put in its place an angel with a golden ray.

I witness many deathbeds of old and young that have nothing terrifying about them. I have just read the life of a minister's wife. A young woman who often visited her said, "If the minister's wife had to die, I am glad she died here; it makes death so much easier for me." The last sentence in the book is, "Her friends felt that it was the shadow of the wing of the Angel of Life that darkened their dwellings as he came to call her home." God seems often in His most merciful providence to prepare children especially for their end, so that they are content to die before death comes. When they are old enough to think, something within, which they know to be true, tells them that they will not be separated for ever from those they completely love. God has given them a strange affliction which carries with it the pledge of eternity. When there is a love stronger than death, the loving soul must also be stronger than death. The moment



STONING OF STEPHEN.

the strength of very sick children begins to return their relish of life revives. God's fatherly care thus prepares living and dying alike for what He is preparing for them. Proofs of this sometimes appear on the face of the dying saint. De Quincey somewhere tells that, on a cloudy day, he has stood on a mountain top in front of a lake upon which the sun was pouring down its golden rays through an unnoticed opening in the clouds. And thus, he says, Stephen's persecutors saw the heavenly radiance upon his face, though they did not see whence it came. The face of the dying sometimes shines with a radiance which comes from the grace of God abounding in the heart.

I often see aged people die, to whom the consolations of Christ are very real and sufficient. "Almost well," said Richard Baxter of himself as he saw death approaching him. "He ceased to be mortal," was written in Latin on a minister's tomb. Even a heathen poet asked, "Who can tell whether to live may not be to die, and to die may not be to live?" As Andrew Fuller paced his bedroom, when sleepless, he was overheard singing—

"This life's a dream, an empty show,
But the bright world to which I go
Has joys substantial and sincere.
When shall I wake and find me there?"

None, I think, are more to be envied than they who have looked death in the face, and by faith got the better of all its terrors, and so frankly take all the

good God gives them in this life, and gladly do their best to serve Him. No fear of them when they come to die. With all your heart you should pity those who really die daily through their fear of death. The mere thought of Christ, even a stray hint of Him, should drive away the gloom that so often hangs around death and the beyond.

Bret Harte, the humourist, seems one day to have come to a mountain top on which stood a cross. A bay stretched before him, whose opposite shore lay in the sunshine. One ship was crossing the bay, and another was anchored in the little haven at his feet. That day he was in a serious mood, and this is how the hint the cross gave him of Christ, transfigured the scene before him.

THE TWO SHIPS.

“As I stand by the cross on the lone mountain’s crest,
Looking over the ultimate sea,
In the gloom of the mountain a ship lies at rest,
And one sails away from the lea.
One spreads its white wings on a far-reaching track,
With pennant and sheet flowing free ;
One hides in the shadow with sails laid aback—
The ship that is waiting for me !

But lo ! in the distance the clouds break away !
The gate’s glowing portals I see ;
And I hear from the outgoing ship in the bay,
The song of the sailors in glee.
So I think of the luminous footprints that bore
The comfort o’er dark Galilee,
And wait for the signal to go to the shore—
To the ship that is waiting for me.”

The empty grave carries our thoughts forward to—

III. *Heaven.*

It is very foolish to banish every idea of our leaving our earthly home. Addison tells the story of a dervise who entered the palace of Balk, mistaking it for a public inn. He laid down his wallet, and spread his carpet. The royal guards, in a great rage, ordered him out; but the king, overhearing the quarrel, came up and asked the dervise how he could be so dull as not to distinguish a palace from a caravansary?

"Sire, give me leave to ask your majesty a question or two? Who lodged here when this house was first built?"

"My ancestors."

"And who lodged here before your majesty?"

"My father."

"And who lodges here now?"

"Myself."

"And who will be here after you?"

"The young prince, my son."

"Ah, sire, a house that changes its inhabitants so often is not a palace, but a caravansary."

Heaven seems most attractive when we keenly feel that earth is an inn and not a home to us and ours. Christ and heaven are then the two great words for us. As Christ rose to heaven, He stretched out His hands in the act of blessing men. He came to earth to bless, and He entered heaven to bless, and He was busy blessing in His passage between the two.

The risen Christ wished to be photographed upon the minds of His disciples in the attitude of benediction. Let your hearts receive this impression of Him, as you gaze into His empty tomb, and ask whither He has gone.

God means us to think often of the risen Christ. Every Lord's day morning reminds us of His resurrection, for the weekly rest was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, because Christ then rose from the grave. On the Lord's day morning the early Christians used to welcome each other with the salutation, "The Lord is risen." This thought should add brightness and gladness to every Lord's day.

And every Sabbath should speak to us of the Sabbath above, and of all the saints who have entered into the rest of God. Think more of the risen Christ, and of the home He has prepared for His people. Every Christian should be a haunted soul—haunted by heaven.

Like the two Marys, then, at the bidding of the angel, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay," and learn all the lessons its emptiness teaches you.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHURCH AND THE CHILDREN.

"And they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed."—*ACTS* xxi. 5.

YOU sometimes amuse yourselves with tableaux. A curtain is withdrawn, and there stands before you a group representing some famed historical event.

This verse brings a remarkable group before our eyes, for we see Paul and Luke and the Christians of Tyre, with their wives and children, all kneeling in prayer on the sea-shore. I wish to introduce to you these Tyrian children.

Paul had probably been at Tyre before, and had founded, or helped to found, the Church there. He was now on his last journey to Jerusalem. He and Luke were passengers in a trading sloop, which called at Tyre, where it had to put out and take in cargo. Paul naturally found out the disciples, and spent the whole week with them. They were not many nor famous—they had to be sought out—and that week would be a grand time with them. All the Christian families in Tyre had grown warmly attached to Paul and Luke, and so they all accompanied them to the ship. The missionaries had won their hearts, though

they had been there only a week. There was a Tyre on the mainland, and another Tyre on the peninsula, and so the port was a little way from one of the Tyres. Luke thinks it worth his while to describe the whole scene minutely and lovingly. Just as the very envelope that has brought good news is dear to us, and is carefully preserved by us, so the surroundings of delightful experiences are gratefully remembered.

When we closely study Luke's words we find in them many warm touches of life. The scene had been photographed upon his gratified heart, and he writes as if his eye were resting on all its little details. His words, literally translated, are, "And we going out through the gate . . . kneeled down on the pebbly or sandy shore." As he writes he sees the city gate through which they passed, and the peculiarities of the shore on which they knelt. I found there, outside the city—"out of the city"—a long range of sandy shore, with many sandy hillocks, amid which you could find many a quiet sanctuary for a little prayer-meeting, shut out from the world, and open only heavenwards. Luke mentions the children, and this is the first notice of children in the Acts of the Apostles. That little company on their knees were as one man, with one heart's desire and prayer. We may be sure that their prayers were not read out of a book, but that they were the outpourings of their own hearts, shaped by their own needs. "And when we had taken leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again." Luke remembers well that leave-taking, and

how on the deck he watched the retreating, lessening forms of his home-going friends. Perhaps they climbed the highest tower in Tyre and watched the flying ship. It soon became a speck, and then melted out of sight, and these friends never met again on earth. No doubt they felt the pathos of such a parting.

I wish to study with you—

I. Paul with the Children.

II. The Children with Paul.

I. *Paul with the children.*

I. He *respected* them. Natural enough as this scene appears to us, it would seem very strange and ridiculous in heathen Tyre. The idea of two teachers having women and children among their disciples, would give the sages of Tyre much and genuine laughter. Think of Plato, or Socrates, or Cicero in such fine company! This scene was thoroughly original, and no scene like it could be found to-day in heathen or Mahomedan lands. In Cairo neither females nor children are allowed to pray in a mosque, or even to be present at a time of prayer. In North Africa lately a missionary told the chief that he wished to teach the women to read. The chief laughed loudly and said, "My horse is more intelligent than any woman in my tribe; you had better teach my horse to read."

If I were to tell you plainly how children were treated by the very best people in Greece and Rome, you would say, "I can't believe a word of it; people

would never treat their children in that way." When a little child was born it was laid at its father's feet. If he lifted it up, it lived; if he turned away, it was taken outside and left to die of cold or hunger, or to be devoured by wild beasts. The same spirit reigns to-day in heathen lands. Miss Carter of Japan tells of a Christian Japanese woman who brought her a girl-baby which its father had thrown into a ditch: "Please do take little baby," the woman said; "your God is the only god that teaches to be good to little children." Fathers in Paul's day took scarcely any interest in their little children, and saw them very seldom. The cities of Greece and Rome contained the most splendid statues and pictures the world has seen, but you could hardly have found any figures of children among them. Their great poets described almost everything in heaven and earth except the pleasures of home and childhood. Their great writers never seem to have discovered that men and women grew from children, for they never wrote books for children, as hundreds of our best writers are doing now. The children at this prayer-meeting intimate to us that Christ has brought with Him a new world, in which children are to have a higher place than they ever had before. A new world for children began on the day when the Child of Mary was laid in the manger of Bethlehem, and the spirit of that world was revealed in the beautiful object-lesson Christ gave when He took little children in His arms, laid His hands upon them, and said over them, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

The Bible everywhere shows a warm side to the children. It surrounds every young life with a sacred interest and dignity. It teaches us that every child is a young immortal, made in God's image, and of greater worth than all the material glories of earth and sky. It reverences the young, not only for what they are, but also for what they may yet become and do. It everywhere breathes a passion to win them early for Christ. In this spirit the great Apostle had the children at his farewell prayer-meeting on the Tyrian shore.

2. Paul *sympathised* with the children.

I am sure that they were very poor children; probably their fathers were sailors, or dock labourers, or slaves; but I am also sure that their poverty would not impoverish the Apostle's sympathy with them. He sympathised with them intellectually. Profound theologian though he was, he had words and prayers for the young. He walked with them out of Tyre step for step, and probably hand in hand, and he knelt with them in prayer. All that is a parable. His mind as well as his body kept step with them. In both these respects he would consider the pace of the children as Jacob did when he said to Esau, "I will lead on softly according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure" (Gen. xxxiii. 13, 14). Paul would not overdrive the tender mind or body. Though he spoke many things hard to be understood, he also spoke many things that children could understand; and he would speak them with a beautiful simplicity. The great

truths of the Bible come to us as simple facts belonging to the life of Jesus Christ. Surely a very little child can understand these. Then, as my sermons show you, the Bible is full of object-lessons that make the truth plain to your very eyes. The Bible has also many bright parables and illustrations, which wonderfully light up the things of the kingdom. Thus the very genius of our religion is for children. The Bible, like Paul going out of Tyre, keeps step with the young. I believe it could be proved that books for children abound only in lands where the Bible is well known. One of the features of our age is the desire to bring all knowledge within the reach of the young. The Great Teacher set the example 1900 years ago. Let us imitate Him in what we teach, and also in our tone and methods; teaching what the young are able to bear; and in our teaching, as in our walking, keeping step with the child whom we lead by the hand. Paul also had spiritual sympathy with the children. He himself had been a religious child, for he yielded to the influences of a pious home. He remembered very well all his strange thoughts of God and the hereafter, all his religious fears, and the strivings of the Spirit through his tender conscience. He also knew very well how many snares lay in the path of a youth in a heathen city like Tarsus, and how easily the brightest young life might be poisoned and ruined. Above all, he had a large share of Christ's own spirit, and so his very soul yearned over the children who knelt with him in prayer. Very likely he implored the God of

Abraham, the family God, the God whose covenant made large room for the children, and breathed the spirit of generous hope for them—very likely, I say, he implored God to keep every one of these children in the sacred footsteps of Christ, and to fit them for great things in His service. He knew well the priceless value of the religion of Christ for these boys and girls kneeling by his side. The early Church had the same spirit, for she had the dolphin among her symbols. The reason was that the dolphin was fabled to have a special tenderness for her young.

3. And no doubt Paul was *hopeful* about them, for his mind was filled with the Old Testament. He thought of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; as the family God and covenant God of His people, all whose promises were for the children as well as the parents. The fact that God's covenant of mercy had taken such remarkable notice of the children, and breathed such a spirit of generous hope regarding them, would work in him a kindred frame of mind. And then he had drunk in the spirit of Christ. He had also great faith in the upbringing and prayers of godly parents, and he would naturally expect the children of such parents as were kneeling with him to be Christians. Thus, I doubt not, the sight of these children made him thank God and take courage. They showed him that the cause of Christ had a great future, and he might delight in the idea of race handing on the name of Christ to race, and the rising generation carrying forward the work of their fathers.

Such hopes as these were the very food of his soul, and would inspire the prayers he offered up amid the sand-dunes of Tyre.

II. *The children with Paul.*

I can scarcely believe that the children were with Paul just because their parents had taken them. I rather think that they liked to be with the Apostle because there was some good thing in their hearts. Had it not been so they would probably have been away fishing, or amusing themselves among the ships in the harbour, or enjoying the scenes in the city, which was thronged with people from all lands. These children would hardly have gone to this prayer-meeting had their hearts not been in the right place. I therefore think that they were Christian children, like those whom the Apostle writes to in his Epistle to the Ephesians when he says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" (chap. vi. 1). If so they had the same *faith* as the Apostle. He was a wonderful thinker, and saw far into the deep things of God, and their knowledge must have been very small. Still they knew the blessed story of the Gospel; they knew that Christ had lived and died for them, that He was able and willing to save them; and they had really put their trust in Him, and were trying to follow Him. I have noticed that when the most learned Christians come to die they often confess their faith in Christ exactly in such words as little children use. When about to enter the kingdom through the gate of death they become

as little children. One of the greatest preachers of our age said on his deathbed, "Sing me a bairn's hymn." A very young child may be a thorough Christian, for the heart of Christianity is trust in the living Christ; and no one knows better than a child what hearty, fearless trust is. Be you content with nothing short of a known acceptance of Jesus Christ. There would be both girls and boys in this kneeling circle. It is a remarkable fact that, so far as we can learn in the Gospels, no woman who was brought near Christ rejected Him. Shall any of our girls do so? One marvels how any yearning, cleaving girl's heart can reject Christ. I sometimes think that the true girl-nature should help faith. The girl is more formed to rely than the boy, and thus should have a greater turn or genius for religion. A girl of six years of age heard her teacher say, "Jesus loves you better than your mother, and wishes you to be His." "Mother, is that true?" the girl asked when she got home. "Yes, my child," was the reply. "Then I will be His," said the girl. The growing boy is apt to be ruder, more self-willed and self-trusting; yet Christ wants and claims our boys as well as our girls. I will give you at least one good reason why a boy should be a Christian. Richard Hooker was one of the best men and best writers. He once said, "If I had no other reason why I would wish to be religious, I would be religious to *make my mother happy.*"

These children of Tyre made the same *confession* as Paul. Probably some of them were bigger boys and

girls at the age when ridicule and laughter have the greatest power over us. As they walked through the city with Luke and Paul, I think it is very likely that their mischievous playfellows would point at them the finger of scorn, and fling at them many a stinging poisoned taunt; but they kept in the sacred company, and joined in the prayer-meeting. It is possible that the children prayed too. Perhaps the prayer went round, as is done on Sabbath evenings in some Christian families, where every voice, from the youngest to the oldest, rises into the ear of their Father in heaven. It is good for children to learn to pray aloud when they are young. Because they have not learnt this lesson in youth, many grown-up people are terribly afraid of their own voices in prayer. Thousands between the ages of twelve and twenty are laughed and jested out of their best convictions and desires. Some naughty, godless companion has more power over them than all the teachings and prayers of a Christian mother or father. Oh, how sad! Pray God to make you loyal and true and strong, so that you shall never hide your colours. Modestly but firmly keep your ground. Be ashamed of shame, and feel that the highest honour in the world is to be on the side of Paul and of Paul's Master. Let your lives show that you are true worshippers, as were these little worshippers on the Tyrian shore.

Once more, these children were interested in the *work* of the Apostle. Their sympathies moved along with his, as their feet had done through the gate of Tyre and along the pebbly beach. Religion was not to

them a dull soulless thing that somehow—they did not know how—had come down to them from far-back ages. It was a grand thing that had kindled their enthusiasm. Paul and Luke might seem to them far grander men than the Roman generals, than Cæsar himself. The parents, I dare say, wished their children to have the image of Paul enshrined in their hearts; but be sure that Paul would not allow them to hero-worship him. He would point them past himself to his Master. These children would so far at least understand the errand of these two men, for whom so many touching prayers were that day offered up. The children would know that these Apostles were fighting against all that was bad and for all that was good; that they meant to overthrow cruelty and darkness, and bring light and joy to all men by teaching them how to live a blessed life on earth, and how to reach heaven at last.

I am sure that Paul prized the presence and goodwill of these children. It was the very food of his heart—the life of his hope. “Courage, Philip,” Luther said, when fighting the battle of the Reformation; “the women and children are praying for us.” He called them “an auxiliary army of magnificent heroes.” Thus Paul’s generous faith and hope would see in his young prayer-fellows founders of Christ’s Church, the evangelisers of the world, and the saviours of society. “They *all* brought us on our way,” Luke says, “with wives and children.” As one man they moved along one path and on to one goal. Every one was a sympathiser and a helper. What power our congregation,

any congregation, would have if all in it—men and wives and children—were to move along in this spirit to the prayer-meeting and to the work of Christ. When the Church of Christ has this spirit it shall shake the world.

You feel, I hope, that it is a grand thing to be a Christian, and to belong to such a society as Christ's Church. Like these children of Tyre, be you linked in heart and soul, even in boyhood and girlhood, with Paul and Luke and the blessed company of the faithful.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

THE END.

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